The New Criterion

Special anniversary issue

September 2001

Volume 20, Number 1

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Special anniversary issue

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Notes & Comments: September 2001

"The New Criterion" at twenty

With this issue, *The New Criterion* begins its twentieth year of publication as a monthly review of culture and the arts. This is a significant accomplishment for any highbrow monthly; for one that has been as outspoken and heterodox as *The New Criterion* it is extraordinary.

The New Criterion was created partly to provide a home for vigorously written cultural criticism, partly to provide a voice of critical dissent. The two go together. At a time when culture and intellectual life are everywhere beholden to the imperatives of political correctness, even insisting on clear prose seems a daring provocation. (Thus one follower of the French decontructionist Jacques Derrida declared that "unproblematic prose" and "clarity" were "the conceptual tools of conservatism.") Similarly, simply telling the truth about a whole host of controversial subjects is regarded as an unacceptable challenge to the reigning pieties of established opinion. Try it and see.

T. S. Eliot once defined criticism as "the elucidation of works of art and the correction of taste." Today, many people entrusted with the care of our cultural heritage would reject Eliot's definition as presumptuous at best. If meaning is radically indeterminate (as we are constantly told), can we really hope to elucidate works of art? And if aesthetic and moral standards are relative, who is to say what counts as good taste, let alone presume to correct its failures? It is no surprise that, by attempting to live up to Eliot's vision of criticism, *The New Criterion* early on found itself at odds with the spirit of the age.

How should we understand that spirit? Ours is indisputably an age of material abundance. We must be thankful for that. Yet almost everywhere one looks, standards of taste, intelligence, and moral discrimination trace a course of perilous decline. Education? Study after study shows that our public schools are a disaster. A shocking proportion of high school students are unable to read, write, or calculate effectively. They are furthermore impoverished by a breathtaking lack of general historical knowledge. By the fifth grade, students know all about the proper use of a condom, but many seniors cannot quite remember who George Washington or Winston Churchill was, nor can they name the century in which the Civil War was fought. Meanwhile, our colleges and universities—those precincts devoted to the humanities and social sciences, anyway—have become scenes of political grievance-mongering, polysyllabic posturing, and tenured irresponsibility.

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It is the same with popular culture. Every season, movies, television, pop music, and other forms of mass entertainment get a little cruder, a little dumber, a little more mindless. The occasional bright spots only highlight the depressing morass that surrounds us. The arts? Wedded to a bankrupt conception of the avant-garde, many of our most conspicuous arts institutions seem to have given up on aesthetic excellence in order to pursue the inanities of "transgressive" gestures. Public manners and morals? Even to ask the question is to answer it. Add to all this the widespread ignorance of our own political traditions and institutions—even of the fundamental tenets of our constitutional democracy—and one arrives at a recipe for cultural catastrophe.

The New Criterion first came on the scene at an earlier stage in the history of this decline in standards and debasement of cultural life. From the outset, what we endeavored to bring to our readers was not a panacea for the cultural and social ills we catalogued. We were never under the illusion that criticism should be a substitute for public policy or political engagement. On the contrary, what we strove to provide was a publication in which responsible alternatives to prevailing orthodoxies could be seriously examined. We sought to provide a home for cultural criticism that was intelligent but not academic, vividly written but not trendy, passionate but not ideological—a mode of criticism, in other words, that had been forsaken as politically invidious by the principal organs of left-liberal thought.

Again, we think of Eliot. Looking back in the mid-1940s to the creation of his magazine *The Criterion* (which in many ways we took as our model), Eliot wrote that he and his colleagues intended it to be partly a means of fostering "common concern for the highest standards of both thought and expression" and partly a means of discharging "our common responsibility . . . to preserve our common culture uncontaminated by political influences." In this respect, too, we have aspired to make *The New Criterion* live up to Eliot's ambition.

This is how we assessed the situation in our initial statement in September 1982:

> Today, more often than not, the prevailing modes of criticism have not only failed to come to grips with such tasks, they have actually come to constitute an obstacle to their pursuit. A multitude of journals of every size and periodicity—quarterlies, monthlies, fortnightlies, weeklies, and even the daily papers to the extent that they concern themselves with matters of the mind—lavishes upon the life of culture a vast amount of attention. Yet most of what is written in these journals is either hopelessly ignorant, deliberately obscurantist, commercially compromised, or politically motivated. Especially where the fine arts and the disciplines of high culture are concerned, criticism at every level—from the daily newspaper review of a concert or a novel to the disquisitions of critics and scholars in learned journals—has almost everywhere degenerated into one or another form of ideology or publicity or some pernicious combination of the two. As a result, the very notion of an independent high culture and the distinctions that separate it from popular culture and commercial entertainment have been radically eroded. Far from resisting this erosion, criticism has lately been responsible for hastening it on its downward course. Not only have our critics assisted in blurring the kinds of distinctions that were once fundamental to their vocation. In many cases they have openly celebrated the demise of such distinctions.
>
> This fateful collapse in critical standards—and in the very idea of critical disinterestedness—is only a part, of course, of a more general cultural drift that has brought some woeful consequences in its wake. It has changed, and changed very much for the worse, the way the arts and the humanities are now studied in our universities. It has changed the way art museums and other cultural institutions now con-

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> ceive of their programs and priorities—and indeed, the very reason for their existence. It plays a role in the way government agencies, private foundations, and corporate sponsors dispense funds for cultural projects. In many cases it has condemned true seriousness to a fugitive existence even in realms, such as the world of scholarship, where it was once highly prized. It has thus altered the conditions of artistic and intellectual life in this country, and made it infinitely more difficult for the voice of informed intelligence to make itself heard, and almost impossible for it to prevail.

Of course, the world has changed a good deal—changed, in some respects, fundamentally—since these words were written. Developments as disparate as the fall of the Soviet empire, the globalization of economic life, and the emergence of the internet have irrevocably altered the political and cultural landscape, while advances in genetic engineering and other technologies confront our morally depleted society with urgent but unanswered questions about life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. What has not changed, however, is the fact that "the conditions of artistic and intellectual life in this country" make it extremely difficult "for the voice of informed intelligence to make itself heard, and almost impossible for it to prevail." In this sense, we believe, the task of *The New Criterion* in nurturing true seriousness is even more exigent today than it was in 1982.

It is worth noting, moreover, that it is not only about the future that our culture is stymied. About the past, too, we are increasingly at a loss. The problem is partly intellectual. With the failure of education, the past becomes more and more inaccessible—a closed book, indeed. But the problem is also partly moral. Our culture seems unwilling to face up to enormities committed in the name of once-cherished illusions, possibly because illusions once cherished are seldom entirely overcome. The collapse of the Soviet Union, for example, brought a welcome end to the Cold War. It spelled the demise of the mythology of a glorious socialist future that had captured the minds, commanded the loyalties, and often extinguished the lives of a great many gifted artists and intellectuals—not to mention the millions of innocents who perished in the name of an imaginary collectivist utopia. Yet these millions of innocents remain unreckoned with—and publicly unmemorialized—in the very societies that caused them so much suffering and death.

Unequipped for the future, unreconciled to the past, our culture increasingly dwells in a precarious present that is (to quote from Eliot once more) "distracted from distraction by distraction." From the beginning, *The New Criterion* has aspired to provide a reasoned alternative to the twittering distractions of the present. We believe in the vocation of criticism, the enabling resources of tradition, the abiding claims of permanent human realities. *The New Criterion* is often described as "conservative," disparagingly by some, respectfully by others. In fact, there is much about *The New Criterion* that is far more liberal, in the classic sense of the term, than our detractors recognize. They fail to recognize this largely because their own liberalism has, in many cases, degenerated into a kind of latitudinarian political correctness. A culture besotted by the Newspeak of "affirmative action" is not "liberal" but simply mendacious. Which is to say that by contemporary standards *The New Criterion* is undoubtedly conservative. We are conservative—proudly so—in exactly the sense that Evelyn Waugh, writing toward the end of his life, said that Rudyard Kipling was conservative:

> [H]e believed civilization to be something laboriously achieved which was only precariously defended. He wanted to see the defenses fully manned and he hated the liberals because he thought them gullible and feeble, believing in the easy perfectibility of man and

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> ready to abandon the work of centuries for sentimental qualms.

Nearly three decades earlier, Waugh had expatiated more fully on this theme. "Barbarism," he wrote in 1938,

> is never finally defeated; given propitious circumstances, men and women who seem quite orderly will commit every conceivable atrocity. The danger does not come merely from habitual hooligans; we are all potential recruits for anarchy. Unremitting effort is needed to keep men living together at peace; there is only a margin of energy left over for experiment however beneficent. Once the prisons of the mind have been opened, the orgy is on. . . . The work of preserving society is sometimes onerous, sometimes almost effortless. The more elaborate the society, the more vulnerable it is to attack, and the more complete its collapse in case of defeat. At a time like the present it is notably precarious. If it falls we shall see not merely the dissolution of a few joint-stock corporations, but of the spiritual and material achievements of our history.

In the perpetual contest between barbarism and civilization, *The New Criterion* is firmly on the side of civilization. We, too, wish to see its defenses "fully manned." We know that culture is a precious inheritance, immeasurably more difficult to achieve than to destroy, and, once destroyed, almost irretrievable. We also know that civilization's fragile emoluments are all that stand between our dreams and chaos—what Edmund Burke famously called "our naked shivering nature." At the same time, it is worth noting that *The New Criterion* is not an antiquarian publication. We are not interested in nurturing cultural nostalgia. We do not seek the pastness of the past, but its living presence. If we have provided a home for critical dissent, we have also sought to provide a forum for critical *assent*. That is one reason we publish the best contemporary poetry we can attract. It is also why we have consistently been sympathetic to the cultural and spiritual ambitions of high modernism. Modernism in this sense is not the enemy but the preserver, the invigorator of tradition. No poet was more deeply concerned with tradition than T. S. Eliot: none was more modernist.

As we set out on our third decade of publication, it seemed appropriate to commemorate this commitment to civilization. We are therefore inaugurating a special year-long series of essays under the rubric "The Survival of Culture: Permanent Values in a Virtual Age." Below, we publish the first installment, "The New Epicureans," by the distinguished political philosopher Kenneth Minogue. Contributors to the series will include Robert H. Bork, Anthony Daniels, Roger Kimball, Hilton Kramer, Eric Ormsby, David Pryce-Jones, Keith Windschuttle, among others. These essays are partly exercises in spiritual anatomy, partly salvage operations. We canvass some of the most significant institutions and trends defining cultural life today. If the tenor of several contributions is somber, their ultimate aim is deeply affirmative: to endorse permanent values in order that culture might not simply survive but flourish.

Introducing Andante.com

It is a pleasure, in this issue inaugurating a series on "The Survival of Culture," to be able to recommend a new venture committed to the survival of the culture of classical music. It is called Andante.com, and as the name suggests it is (in part) an internet venture. Having begun last spring, its stated purpose is "to document and preserve the world's recorded classical music heritage, and to become the definitive online resource for information about classical music and opera." Andante is the brainchild of Alain Coblence, a French lawyer and the head of the European Mozart Foundation.

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He is joined by Pierre Bergé, the former head of the Paris Opera, and Jean Francis Bretelle, a French venture capitalist. On the advisory board of Andante are several distinguished musicologists (Henry-Louis de La Grange, Jean-Jacques Nattiez), as well as eminent musical artists such as Pierre Boulez and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau.

When Coblence first envisioned Andante, his aim was to help preserve the history of classical music performance by issuing high-quality CDs of historic performances. Remastered with the most advanced audio technology, these recordings delve back as far as the late 1920s. Eventually, Andante will issue over a thousand CDs, handsomely packaged in a way meant to recall the format and (Coblence's word) romance of vintage LPs and featuring extensive scholarly liner notes. The series will have four parts: great composers, great operas, great interpreters, and great orchestras. One of their first offerings is a four CD set of performances by the Vienna Philharmonic. It consists of a 1957 version of Bruckner's Symphony No. 8 conducted by Herbert von Karajan, a 1960 recording of Mahler's Symphony No. 9 conducted by Dimitri Mitropoulos, and a 1963 recording of Richard Strauss's *Tod und Verklärung* and *Ein Heldenleben* conducted by Karl Böhm. If these CDs are representative of what Andante will produce, music lovers should rejoice.

The CDs that Andante produces will apparently be available in some retail outlets. But they will be marketed primarily on the Andante website, www.andante.com. This website is far more than an online catalogue, however. It is one of the most culturally impressive internet sites we have encountered. The website, which has been up since April and is still under construction, provides a window on the whole world of classical music. It features a continuously updated calendar and news wire stories from around the world about musical events and personalities. It also offers a searchable reference database that includes listings of music in print, discographies, the *Concise Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, and concert notes from Michael Steinberg's *Listener's Guides*. It offers a listing of classical music websites and radio stations, and also includes numerous online music reviews from a wide range of sources. In its "Musicroom," "Andante Radio" offers streaming audio of classical music—as we write, a selection from Rossini's *Barbiere di Siviglia* is playing. Suppose you were thinking of acquiring a recording of Handel's *Athalia*. Eventually, you will be able to search for all available recordings and listen to a sample from each before you purchase.

Andante is also in the process of signing agreements with major orchestras around the world—Berlin, Vienna, Philadelphia, New York, among others—for the rights to broadcast their performances. Many performances will be broadcast with video as well as audio. They will be available shortly after the performance and, eventually, will be downloadable from Andante's library of music. Andante depends on some pretty fancy technology. But it is all in the service of a venerable ideal: preserving and disseminating the best that the classical music tradition has to offer. For now, all of Andante is free. Eventually, certain parts of it—some of the musical offerings and some of the research libraries—will be available only to subscribers. We have all heard a lot about the promise and peril of the internet. Andante is a welcome illustration that, deployed with intelligence and sensitivity, this daunting technology can be the handmaiden, not the enemy, of high culture.

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The survival of culture: I

The new Epicureans

by Kenneth Minogue

In a famous passage at the beginning of Book II of *De Rerum Natura*, Lucretius talks of the pleasure of watching other people endure dangerous situations. As Dryden rendered the passage:

> 'Tis pleasant, safely to behold from shore
> The rolling ship, and hear the tempest roar.

It isn't, Lucretius goes on to say, that we are pleased at the troubles of others, but that we take pleasure in realizing that these are troubles from which we're not suffering. Nature, Lucretius observes, in an early probe into the modern horrors of stress, wants only two things—the absence of pain, and the absence of worry.

This is part of the Epicurean art of living, and the way you achieve equanimity of mind is by a philosophical discipline requiring you to follow long chains of reasoning (about the nature of death, for example) and eschew the ephemeral pleasures of luxury and society. Lucretius's imagined philosopher finds it sweet

> To see vain fools ambitiously contend
> For wit and power.

Two roads to happiness confront us: that of action and that of contemplation. So far as the philosopher is concerned, there is no contest. Worldly commitments demand action, and action often leads to pain and failure. But the life of contemplation cannot fail, because we have withdrawn our hopes and fears from the world, and have understood ourselves as merely one object in a universal scheme. For most people in the past, the contemplative option was not available, or was available only in a religious form, which had its own dangers. The Epicurean contemplative was thus the fine fruit of a rich elite in the classical world, an elite that devoted itself to personal self-fulfilment. It is hardly surprising that the Roman general Fabricius, on learning about this philosophy, hoped that all Rome's enemies might adopt it.

As self-conscious beings, we are of course always in some degree the spectators as well as the participants in our own lives, but modern conditions have facilitated a remarkable shift in the balance between action and reflection. In reflection, we become spectators of the human comedy, and spectatorship as a mode of responding to the world has not only become possible but has even come to dominate the way we live our lives. In its most elementary form, this change results simply from the abundance of leisure we enjoy. Instead of the odd occasion imagined by Lucretius in which someone can watch a ship in trouble from the shore, we can through the media of film and television enjoy the interesting sensation of watching people in dire trouble from the comfort of our own homes. At this most elementary level, the contemporary Epicurean is the couch potato. We

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are sated on the pleasure of tranquillity as we watch terrible things (real or fictional) happening to others.

As we might expect in our modern complexity, spectatorship as a mode of responding to the world now comes in a variety of forms, though all of them involve detachment from particular commitments. This sort of "hanging loose" has become the axis on which our moral universe is revolving, and we may distinguish two distinct forms of it. The first consists in the deliberate avoidance of burdens, as when we prefer not to commit ourselves to marriage and children, or not to volunteer for military or other kinds of dangerous or burdensome service. A wife and children are, as Bacon put it, the hostages a man gives to fortune, and keeping tomorrow uncluttered by such things can be construed as the essence of freedom. Most philosophers in the past were detached from particular involvements of this kind, no doubt, but they were committed (as our modern Epicureans are not) to the philosophical pursuit of truth itself.

A second type of detachment is less conspicuous because it takes an intellectual or a political form. It consists in a self-understanding that is simultaneously highly particular *and* highly abstract. It contrasts sharply with the common self-understanding of earlier times, when most people defined themselves in terms of region, nation and state, or profession. In *Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and Its Rivals*, Ernest Gellner wrote that the West was distinguished by "modularity" in which any person can fit into any social organization to perform (within limits) any task. Gellner contrasted this with the situation in traditional societies, in which status resulted from specialization. But specialization in a changing society can itself become a kind of hostage to fortune, and our contemporaries dislike its narrowness, and perhaps the contingent human costs that may go with it.

A society of spectators is as different from a society of participants as detachment is from commitment. For one thing, participants, by the very fact of cooperation, constitute a community, whereas all that spectators can do is *associate* with one another. The odd thing is that the spread of detachment as a way of life and the talk of perfecting community can both feature as powerful assumptions of our moral understanding.

I propose to explore both of these modes of detachment and to indicate some of the implications they have for the survival of culture. First, let us consider the most explicit form of this new Epicurean art of living: the straightforward avoidance of the burdensome. The decline of marriage is a conspicuous example. The increasing avoidance of marriage in contemporary Western society is often seen as resulting from nervousness about committing oneself. It might equally be presented as a triumph of Epicurean wisdom. In order to see what is at stake in the decline of marriage, we can begin by turning the question on its head and asking: why is it that lots of people still do actually want to get married and establish families?

In earlier generations, the question would have made no sense, because everyone took it for granted that both duty and happiness guided us towards this pattern of life. To cross what Joseph Conrad called "the shadow line" from the insouciance of youth to the solidity of responsibilities was part of a complete life, involving marriage at least for women and jobs or careers for men. Today, however, less than a quarter of Americans apparently live in families with children. Much of this might be explained as a merely negative avoidance of the burden of responsibility, but the shape of a positive "ideology of singleness" is already emerging. In a long life, runs this doctrine, the commitment of two people to each other is a risky business, riddled with the illusions of romantic love. Children are an expensive luxury, and no longer necessary as an insurance against destitution in old age. The mother who works is likely to face hostility from fellow employees who resent the fact that they may have to stay late because she

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has had to attend to sickness or some school meeting. A bad sign is all the public sentimentality to the effect that "the interest of the children must come first." In fact, children are widely feared and regarded as tiresome, which indeed they sometimes can be. If you take happiness to be the avoidance of pain and worry, marriage and family life must feature as the quintessence of folly. And this mere *via negativa* sometimes becomes positive in an actual denigration of those who embrace this folly: the view that those who opt for parenthood are really a little sad—people who don't have enough to fill their lives. Children are not only a "lifestyle choice," but might even be thought a rather puzzling, even deplorable one.

In an article called "What Are Children For?" in the June 2001 issue of the British magazine *Prospect*, Laurie and Matthew Taylor found that most people with families today had difficulty saying why they had created children. Obviously in terms of cost accounting, children are an indulgence, and the economist Joseph Schumpeter long ago suggested that men and women would soon come to regard them as a bad bargain. Most parents when asked by Professor Taylor hesitated to say that they "wanted to have children because such children will be their *descendants*." In a future-oriented society, this is one aspect of the future that seems to be strangely occluded, perhaps out of fear of seeming to be concerned with such an individualist aspiration as wanting to perpetuate one's name and history. The idea is that one not only lives for the present, but also *ought* to live thus. And this attitude gives us some clue about the way society is moving. Remember that Burke back in 1790 thought he was merely reporting common opinion when he said that society was indeed a contract, but not any old commercial contract. Rather, it was a grand link uniting the living, the dead, and those yet to be born. Burke regarded human life as a linkage over time in which the individual gained his significance from where he came from and where his family was going. Indeed, the very fact of membership in a family imparted respectability. Slaves procreated, no doubt, but they did not have the status of families. The change in our attitude to families is thus related to our sense of ourselves in time and also to our sense of our relation to society. Slaves had a master, but otherwise they were marvelously detached.

If we apply the calculus of "rational choice," family life might well be seen as the solution to a problem whose time has gone.

Today human development is curiously flatter. . . . Children unwrap the gifts of life at a tender age and are already launched on a parody of adulthood by their early teens.

Sex and companionship are easily available without the trouble and expense of setting up one's own dedicated facilities. This release from practical necessity is another aspect of our liberation from biology as destiny. And along with that liberation has come a significant change in how we construe a human life. The traditional recognition that, organically speaking, we go through the stages of youth, maturity, and senescence, corresponding to innocent youthful dreaming, to purposive achievement, and ultimately to serene wisdom, has been lost. In the past, these were the inescapable modes of human experience.

Today human development is curiously flatter; modalities have disappeared. Children unwrap the gifts of life at a tender age and are already launched on a parody of adulthood by their early teens. Yet many remain who experience that curious restlessness that Conrad spoke of in *The Shadow Line*, "moments when the still young are inclined to commit rash actions such as getting married suddenly, or else throwing up a job for no reason." In Conrad's day, the

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essence of morality was still coherence. The marriage contracted on impulse might be hell, the job that had been abandoned turn out in retrospect to be the best possible, but one had made one's bed and one had to lie on it. In moral terms, the possibilities of the future were circumscribed by the commitments of the past, and the individual's life was a narrative of engagement and response.

Today, by contrast, people talk about "reinventing themselves." Very little is irrevocable. Marriages can be unmade, the job market is more flexible, and pleasant prospects always seem to be beckoning. This is a mode of life in which there is no essential difference between youth, maturity and old age: all is a kind of youth, though less innocent, in which the same pleasures are pursued throughout life. Every recourse associated with any stage of life can reappear later, even crime. It has recently been reported that some old people, in need of a bit of extra cash, have resourcefully turned to fraud, or holding up the local convenience store with a mask on. Do not talk to me of the wisdom of old men, says the poet. The ideal death envisaged by our contemporaries is heart failure at about eighty in the arms of a lover.

Nor has theory been a laggard to practice. A good deal of the stuff called "re-thinking" has been going into "relationships," a term that only acquired its current scope—covering everything from a lover to a business contact—about the middle of the twentieth century. "Close relationship theory," as it is called, explores the conditions of satisfaction possible in intimate unions. The Canadian Bar Association is among many legal organizations arguing that the current legal focus on marriage should give way to a consideration of "the substance of relationships." The test of a relationship, according to this reasoning, is whether it creates satisfaction; if it doesn't, there is no reason not to change it. Love has no objective existence: it is "a shifting metric" by which each of us defines whether or not a relationship ought to continue. Such relationships are dyadic, and it will be clear that children are a disruptive force. They feature in one book, alongside drug addiction and alcohol, as potential threats to relationships.

This is perhaps the purest example of the Epicurean process by which the conventions of particular involvement are dissolved in what one might call "soothing abstractions"—soothing, that is, to anything that might frustrate an impulse. Other ways in which this process operates are more oblique, as we shall see.

Optimizing pleasure is, then, one way of treating life as a spectacle. One stands aside and keeps calculating the hedonic impact of the specific burdens that might result from participation. What does this growing doctrine of detachment presuppose?

The idea behind it is a kind of individualism—the idea that freedom is choosing—but it is an individualism quite different from that which launched the modern world. The earliest individualists were men (women generally came into it later) who had personal projects of their own to pursue and therefore found the expectations by which society stereotyped them restrictive. Their projects were often about making money, or spreading the true worship of God, or some political settlement. What distinguished these figures above all, however, was that they did not easily fit into a traditional society. This kind of individualism led over time to the emergence of the sovereign state, a remarkable institution that developed the authority to change laws without actually violating them. This power to repeal inherited laws and commitments was what made the modern European state so dynamic and flexible. Those who came to the fore in this new institutional world were deeply serious about their projects and were consumed by a passion for duty and a hatred of idleness. They had a rich inner life based on the imagery of the Bible and a morality requiring that they should keep their commitments in good repair. Kant argued that the moral essence of a human being was autonomy. This did not at all

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mean that the laws of God or nature were rejected, but it did mean that these individuals insisted on interpreting and deciding on actions for themselves.

In each generation, no doubt, individualism was something rather different, but in the first half of the nineteenth century a distinctly different view of individualism began to evolve. It signalled its appearance by a new vocabulary, and being an individualist became honorific. It was the time when the terms "individualist" and "individualism" came into currency. Before that, individualists resembled Molière's M. Jordan who discovered to his delight that he had been speaking prose "for more than forty years without knowing it." They pursued their desires unselfconsciously within a law-governed world. When people sought to turn individuality into a mark of distinction, however, they narrowed it down to mere eccentricity. You were an individualist to the extent that you stood out from the crowd, like Gérard de Nerval taking his lobster for a walk along the streets of Paris on a leash. You demonstrated your individuality by not being conformist. Individualism became, paradoxically, a fashion, and the world filled up with simple people following the philosopher Sinatra by singing "I did it my way." This usually meant they had made a mess of it. Perhaps doctrines no less than revolutions can, as Marx put it, happen first as tragedy and then as farce. For clearly the individualism of Calvin and Kant, which could take people to the block for a principle, was a quite different thing from the light-mindedness of Sinatra.

How was it that the old severe individualism modulated into the new, light-minded one? The key idea orchestrating this transformation was the identification of individuality with choice. If individuality were merely the exercise of choice, then the freest man in the world would be someone wandering round a supermarket, or perhaps the sultan in his harem. This is the freedom of the bazaar. It is life as an endless traffic with options. The old individualist was a creature of desires, but in desires begin responsibilities. The new individualist was merely a creature of impulse. Desires entail responsibilities; impulses merely have consequences. But a change in conventions may remove the sting from consequence, as it has in the case of the unwanted pregnancies of single mothers. Or a benign government may step in to nullify the consequences of imprudence in health or work. The drift of the contemporary world thus seems to be the removal of necessity from life in order that we can everywhere indulge our "right to choose." A woman can be a soldier, a man can be a woman, sex can be a costless indulgence, the old can indulge the appetites of the young, and so on. Society comes increasingly to resemble a fantasy playground.

Perhaps doctrines no less than revolutions can, as Marx put it, happen first as tragedy and then as farce.

The problem with fantasy, however, is that it might nastily collide with reality. Role-playing can be fun. But females are merely chocolate soldiers, men can have themselves surgically altered to resemble women but cannot bear children, and self-indulgent sex is to committed sex as tourism is to travel. No reality without cost.

The curious thing is that individualism is being destroyed in the name of individualism. Or maybe it isn't curious at all. For certainly the process by which this has come about replicates a standard rhetorical procedure for corrupting ideas. Corruption occurs when some abstract element of an idea, some part of it, is mistaken for the whole—in this case the whole morality of individualism as a form of freedom. To be an individualist in the old sense did indeed involve choice, but the morally serious individualist was someone who had evolved from understanding himself as a mere follower of rules to one who understood his

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life in terms of the coherence of his commitments. In most cases, such an individualist did not in fact make a great number of choices, for he was rooted in his own soil. If you remove this vast hinterland of responsibility from individualism, you are left with the superficial notion that being "free to choose" makes one an individualist. What is demanded is not just being free to choose—but to choose, and choose again, and again. It is hard to distinguish such shallowly revocable choices from mere drift.

One form of detachment, then, is the avoidance of burdensome responsibilities so as to be forever free to indulge a string of mere preferences. It can easily be mistaken for the hardier individualism on which our civilization was founded. I have sketched out an image of this new detachment in terms of family life, but might as easily have considered its effect on the way individuals discharge their responsibilities to country, church, and other civil associations. It is clear that what I am discussing abuts at several points recent studies of the declining potency of civil association in Western life, such as those of Robert Puttnam.

But there is another sort of detachment from particularity, one whose outward consequences do not always appear as dramatically as does the rejection of family life. This detachment consists in moving from a particular to an abstract way of understanding oneself, as when the member of a nation comes to think of himself primarily as a rights-bearing human being, or when a woman understands herself less in terms of specific family membership than under the abstract category "woman." Each of us grows up in a family, a neighborhood, a school, perhaps a trade, and this can constitute the whole world. In the past it often did. Today, of course, none of us can avoid at least some elementary map of the wider world. We get it from the media, the schools, and above all from higher education. Education is something only really possible to those few who have a reflective disposition, but in the modern world half the population is "intellectualized" by attendance at pedagogic institutions. They are supplied, that is, with a range of abstract ideas, a kind of sociology, which allows them to place themselves in some grand scheme of nations and the world. They may recognize themselves as members of a civilization, class, type of economy, religion, morality, and much else. Such self-recognition cannot help leading in some degree to detachment from the inherited loyalties.

The drift of the contemporary world thus seems to be the removal of necessity from life in order that we can everywhere indulge our "right to choose." A woman can be a soldier, a man can be a woman, sex can be a costless indulgence, the old can indulge the appetites of the young, and so on. Society comes increasingly to resemble a fantasy playground.

Schooling enhances the power of pupils at the cost of detaching them from their local roots. A little learning, as Alexander Pope observed, is a dangerous thing, and in the modern world it leaves most people bereft of their roots, yet at the same time little touched by the kind of sophisticated skepticism that could restore their sense of the tradition from which they came.

Much of the intellectualization of modern life results from ideology. For over a wide range of curricula, schooling and the practicalities of ideology interpenetrate. An ideology is a form of thought which teaches people to identify themselves as members of an abstract class: proletarians, women, members of a nation or race, disabled, gay, etc. As such, an ideology supplies projects

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and scripts for these groups to live by. It has the effect of shifting political attention away from interests towards ideas. An interest is local and limited, and thus flexible; an idea is universal and unlimited. Interests can be negotiated, but ideas tend to be intransigent. The farmer, the entrepreneur, and the priest all have what can be recognized as interests. The intellectual and the bureaucrat are creatures of ideas: no matter what happens, they will always have suitable materials for their activity. Politics driven by an idea is an adventure for the young whose passion it is to enjoy change.

Twentieth-century politics abounded in dramatic examples of political adventuring which left interests far behind in order to gamble on ideal possibilities: something attractive only to people so detached from their interests as to have entirely lost their bearings. These adventures would have been impossible if their promoters had failed to find some actual class of people so detached from their society as to constitute a natural pool of followers. Marx thought that the people he had defined as a "proletariat" were alienated from the particular loyalties of their society, but it turned out that very many were not. Proletariats are definitionally constituted by a condition called "oppression" and many more have been created since Marx—to such an extent, indeed, that it is not difficult to present the whole of society as constituted of oppressed minorities.

We have thus arrived at the point where modern societies can be understood as essentially oppressive, even though no particular set of people is discovered to be the oppressors. The idea of oppression without an oppressor is, indeed, curious, but it makes sense if society itself is understood as a bad system. Just such an understanding has become the standard machinery for detaching individuals from particular allegiances. To understand myself as an oppressed member of the family, state, world, etc., to which I belong is the first step towards detachment. It is not, as we shall see, an end to participation in society, but it can be the prelude to a new type of participation.

How does the process of detachment work? Consider a feminist engaged in the proselytism called "consciousness-raising." Its aim is to persuade women to detach themselves from the particularities of family life and to understand themselves under the abstract character of women. Feminist intellectuals rapidly equipped this new abstraction with its own history, sociology, and even a kind of politics. As an identification, it certainly had resonance, but it inevitably lacked the concrete immediacy of any specific commitment.

Education and ideology, although fundamentally different, currently function in the same way, detaching individuals from their particular loyalties. This is one reason that unfortunate peoples in non-Western societies fell into the trap of thinking ideology could be an instrument of modernization. Ideology is much easier than education; it is much easier to pick up the melodramatics of Communism, fascism, feminism, nationalism, and so on than it is to become educated. But with both, the increased range and power of thought that abstract ideas provide entail a certain loss of specificity. Willa Cather in one of her short stories observes about the immigrant communities of Nebraska that the older children who had to get jobs in order to support the younger children who were thus enabled to go off to college possessed a certain vitality of character missing in their more fortunate juniors. The sociologist David Riesman, writing about how Jews responded to the breaking down of the restriction of the ghetto after the French Revolution, remarks: "Many Jews in the main Western countries surrendered their inherited ethical system in return for a chance to participate in the wider world, thus losing their special sources of spiritual strength." Detachment from one's small platoon is an inescapable part of the package of modernity, and it has all the features of other kinds of "liberation," including

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cost. Of course, rootedness in any institution—family, ethnic heritage, religion—can be experienced as imprisoning. Children sometimes quarrel with their parents and run away to the city, where increasingly they find they will have status as abstract bearers of rights.

The rise of the abstract individual is most conspicuous in those extreme cases where individual impulse collides with institutional tradition. Consider the case of a pupil who decides she does not like the uniform of her school. In the actual case I am referring to, the school required girls to wear skirts. The girl in question, pleading that she was cold in winter, wanted to wear trousers like the boys. She took legal action against the school on the ground that her right to choose what she wore was being denied. Other options were of course possible, most obviously wearing warmer tights or changing schools, but she preferred to go to law so as to bend the institution to what she wanted.

Or consider the homosexual who wanted to be a Boy Scout leader, or the actress five months pregnant who complained about being dismissed from the production of a Gilbert & Sullivan operetta in which she was to play a virgin. We all have our favorite cases, but what links most of them is that the freedom of the "individual" is packaged as a right and used as a battering ram against the autonomy of institutions. Schools, theaters, and especially business firms are being forced to sacrifice some element of their distinctiveness in order to accommodate the demands of individuals. Little if anything is to be allowed to stand in the way of choice.

A schoolgirl, a pregnant actress, a homosexual—these are particular configurations whose characteristics, permanent or temporary, constitute the real diversity of society. In being what they are, and perhaps in suffering what they suffer, they would contribute willy-nilly to the real variety of society. But these people do not wish to develop or explore the inwardness of their particularity, given the sacrifices that that might involve. They all reject these particularities and deny that they can be legitimately judged by conventional social criteria. They wish to be understood abstractly as rights-bearing individual members of a society in which "anything goes."

The curious thing is that individualism is being destroyed in the name of individualism.

In the past, each of these characteristics would have been considered a destiny, even though the female pupil would grow up and the actress soon cease to be pregnant. Today, conventions and legal judgments allow any particularities that conflict with impulse to be jettisoned. Each person seeks to detach himself from his particular character and situation in order to find a preferred location at the level of universal humanity. Particularity—being a schoolgirl and subject to rules, being pregnant and subject to restrictions, being homosexual and subject to suspicion when engaged in certain tasks—are all seen as forms of imprisonment incompatible with an open society. And the warders of this prison are the institutions that constitute society.

Epicurus and Lucretius thought that happiness resulted when the philosopher detached himself from the world and treated the human condition as a spectacle. This detachment could take two forms. One was withdrawing from burdensome involvement in the business of life, such as the family or the city. The other was an act of mind that allowed the philosopher to understand himself as a purely rational being standing above the passions of the herd. The modern world has greatly multiplied analogues of these modes of detachment. Even the humble couch potato is contingently detached from the violence around him, while the person who rejects familial or civic responsibilities could claim to exemplify the philosophic indifference of the Epicurean. Such indifference was not a

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heroic response to the world. As Gibbon was later to write, skeptical philosophers could not believe, and Epicureans could not act. The modern Epicurean, however, is by no means a mere drone; he or she is likely to be extremely busy, for modern circumstances are very different from those of the classical Mediterranean. Indeed, it is the activist character of modern detachment that makes it so pervasive.

This activism is certainly conspicuous in the case of perhaps the most subtle form of detachment that has emerged in modern societies. It is what detaches modern professionals from the traditions of their own practice. To be a modern professional was until recently not only to exercise a specific form of power, but often also to be marked out by different kinds of dress. The teacher wore a gown, the lawyer a wig, the soldier a variety of uniforms, and so on. These signs conferred status and marked off the professional from the man in the street. Today most of these insignia are being replaced by a determined informality ("casual Fridays," for example) whose explicitly egalitarian message is to say: "We are of the same clay as you, and our very competence would be in question if we could not show that we have shared most of the experiences of life with you."[1]

In any case, the professional was also distinguished by other signs of his profession beyond the sartorial. The soldier could be recognized by his bearing, the lawyer by his dryness, the teacher by his pedantry, and so on. Each had what the French call a *déformation professionelle*. To enter a profession, as indeed to do anything else serious in life, was to embrace a limitation that excluded the practitioner from other possibilities. Yet precisely this distinctiveness has come to be understood as a kind of prison unwelcome to intelligent people eager to "play a full part in society." Some professionals—lawyers and clergymen, for example—suffer the additional indignity of being caricatured in intellectual circles as mere props of a status quo widely thought to be unjust.

The stress induced by this reputation has been remarkable, but it had a simple cure—liberation, which turned out to be so easy.

Here is a remarkable dream of a society that is not a society. Everybody floats.

It involved becoming critical of society and taking on a new and interesting responsibility, not to clients but to society as a whole. The point was to improve it. Those liberated professionals experienced the pleasing realization that they had in their hands powers they had not previously used: the teacher dealt with the minds of the rising generation, the lawyer felt dissatisfied with the dry technicalities of tribunals and was tempted to implement his judgment about what justice required, the doctor began to take an interest in the social and political implications of epidemiology, and so on. In other words, the liberation of the professional resulted from embracing democratic responsibilities that might well clash with the narrow demands of a profession. The lawyer was no longer satisfied with saying: "This, alas, is the law, and if you want a different result, you had better get the politicians to change it. But you should not forget that hard cases make bad law."

The case of the entertainment industry, now reputedly the largest industry in the United States, has its own special features. Film and television are the purveyors of fantasy to the nation. Like the investigative journalist, the actor and director want to improve the world by revealing concealed truths. Exposing evils gave artists a function, affirming ideals gave them a respectable identity. Actors have always been on the margins of society and have as a consequence generally been at war with its con-

1 Even politicians are affected by this tendency. After the Conservative Party in Britain was disastrously defeated in the election of June 2001, a political journalist was asked what they must do to return to favor. "They must give up their ties," he replied, and he meant neckties.

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ventions. Like artists of all kinds, indeed, rather like children, they actually need conventions and boundaries in order to subvert them. In the modern world, in which every activity has become material for the journalist and the actor, we cannot escape the derisive laugh of the irresponsible exploiter of absurdity. It is not by seeing things in context that the writer and the film producer produce the *frisson* they seek, but precisely by detaching them from context. And such detachment is a form of abstraction: the world as mere horror, mere comedy, mere tragedy, etc.

Detachment from the small platoon of everyday commitments is increasingly the character of the world we live in, and it can be understood both in terms of its causes and of its deeper significance. So far as its causes are concerned, I shall simply list them, partly because they are widely discussed and partly because they raise issues that go far beyond my concerns. Clearly the first cause lies in the social and geographical mobility of Europeans. Having spread throughout the world, Europeans created a technology that makes it easy for people to follow opportunity wherever they think it may be found. Travel is the most elementary form of detachment.

The second cause lies in the prosperity of the modern economy, or what those who dislike commerce call "capitalism." Commerce means that relationships can be evaluated in terms of whatever benefits they produce, and loyalty to family, firm, or even religion may well be judged irrational. Modern economies have produced such wealth that most people now have the resources that will allow them to change their situation pretty radically if they should choose. And modern technology has allowed us to find alternatives to situations that previously we had to endure.

The third cause lies in democratic government which, taking its bearings from the poor, imposes a kind of dependence on everyone. But this is a dependence that has the outward show of independence: governments provide us with medicine, education, pensions, and welfare. In a socialist society everything is free. That's not quite the case with us today, but many things have been socialized in this way.

These are forces in modern life so powerful that it is remarkable that anything can stand against them. Yet in a modern society, loyalties of all kinds, remarkably, do survive. But they live in shallow soil.

The commonest way of understanding the detachment I have been analyzing is in terms of the dream of liberation. Particular loyalties are thrown over because they are seen as prisons, and the life of an abstract bearer of rights is embraced because it seems to correspond with freedom. The roots of this idea are immensely complicated and like much else they emerge from theological controversy. But their character can be illustrated by that famous passage in which Marx (in *The German Ideology*) speaks of the life of man under socialism. The passage attacks the division of labor as an alienation from true communal life imposed by a class-divided society. According to Marx's fantasy of life under Communism, however, no one has an exclusive sphere of activity. Anyone can become anything, which means that one could "hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic."

Here is a remarkable dream of a society that is not a society. Everybody floats. The examples chosen are no doubt a little odd and would hardly be so plausible if I were to substitute being a brain surgeon in the morning and an airline pilot in the afternoon, but they do call to mind one of the features of modern life: namely, that a great deal of work consists of shuffling symbols in an office, and, that over a considerable range, one office worker can learn to do pretty much what another can do. All you need is a bit of "higher education." And this interchangeability is central to a world of abstract, multi-competent individuals.

The basic point, however, is that Marx

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construes as unfree, indeed as evil, the condition in which a person is limited to the character of a single profession. Any institutional involvement is a prison, a form of oppression that limits one's full participation in society itself. Families are no different. The Communist ideal is that children should be communally reared, and the supposedly furtive privacies of the household should give way to the communal restaurant and the dormitory. Community's the thing, and one is only free in being attached to that alone. In such a free community, there would be no privacy because there would be no need for it. An actual right to privacy is only valuable as an inadequate protection against the oppressive conventions of a class-divided society.

What is at stake in the ideal of detachment? It is, from one point of view, a version of Rousseau in which the citizen is free in being guided by the "general will" alone. From another point of view, it exhibits aspects of an infantile fantasy, a dream of life as a children's playground in which one might move, like a rich dilettante, from toy to toy according to the promptings of impulse. But it is hard not to think that there is more to it than this, and that it reveals to us a lot that is otherwise mysterious about the modern world.

The idea is clearly that the world is basically evil because it is restrictive, and hence that the business of life is to detach oneself from it. For we live in a world that suppresses our authenticity by forcing upon us all kinds of pretences, responsibilities, duties, etc. In the rhetoric of the modern revolutionary, this alienating world is referred to as "capitalism" and characterized root and branch as commercial, consumerist, oppressive, ruthless, profit-driven, and unequal. And this is not just one political opinion among others, such as political parties disagree about. It is a conviction in our civilization so deep that it will surface again in some new form after every disaster. The burnt fool's bandaged finger, as Rudyard Kipling put it, wobbles ever closer to the fire.

Moths can never learn that it is not smart to fly into the flame. When human beings exhibit the same immunity to learning from experience, we had better recognize that we are dealing with something like a religion, which is to say a comprehensive understanding of the meaning of life. And in this case we can find an imperfectly concealed structure of civilizational self-hatred which exhibits its own morality, liturgy, demonology, and eschatology. It derives from many sources, ultimately from the gnostic beliefs that proliferated at the time that Christianity was developing.

The modern diversity exemplified by governments forcing various institutions to include women, ethnic groups, the disabled, those with different sexual preferences, etc., in their membership is, of course, a semantic swindle. It is simply homogeneity by government diktat.

Gnosticism was the belief that the world had been created by an evil power that competed with God for mastery of the world. Unlike orthodox Christianity, gnosticism was an esoteric form of knowledge, restricted to initiates, that was said to be necessary to achieve salvation. And in some versions, anything that served to sustain the continuance of this evil world, such as procreation, was forbidden. (Some gnostic sects had no problem with homosexuality as a preferred mode of sexual activity since it did not bring children into an evil world. The very etymology of the term "bugger" derives from a tenth-century gnostic sect in the Balkans called the "Bogomils.")

There is a remarkable modernity about Lucretius. He would have made a superb counselor. He attributed most of the un-

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happiness in the world to "superstition" (the word he used was *religio*, which referred to the convictions that bound Roman society together.) He was a scientific materialist who did not believe in an afterlife, and he provided many reasons why it is irrational to fear death. The point of life was pleasure, by which he meant not luxury and excitement but the purring detachment of a somewhat self-satisfied philosopher. The roots of this doctrine are philosophical, though in Lucretius the philosophical patter largely serves one of those consolatory versions of the art of living that are hard to distinguish from do-it-yourself religions.

It certainly isn't because modern Europeans have been studying Epicurus that his doctrine exhibits such a remarkable affinity with the way our civilization is moving. It may rather be that we are in a civilizational situation similar to that of the Hellenistic Greeks, playing our games amid the fragments left by the achievements of greater ancestors. Or it may be that large segments of the population now find themselves released from necessity the way some Greco-Roman elites were. But there is no doubt that the modern educated consciousness is characterized by the kind of superior detachment from particular loyalties, and a disposition to enjoy life as a spectacle, which we find in the Epicureans.

There is, however, a difference. The ancient Epicurean opted for a quiet private life away from the hurly-burly of the world. He was, politically speaking, a rather feeble figure. Our abstract individualists, on the contrary, have detached their loyalties from state, church, and family only to attach them, in many cases, to a range of abstract causes expected through political action to achieve the perfection of human life.

The consequence is a transformation of our moral world. Morality has modulated into a kind of sociality. No doubt most people still understand goodness in terms of such virtues as honesty, integrity, kindness, and so on. But for many people, morality has become entangled with holding the "right" opinions, with support for so-called ethical causes such as environmentalism, aid to the Third World, and opposition to smoking, landmines, or torture. Morality, in other words, becomes swallowed up in desirable public policy. Evil is identified as failure to support righteousness and, especially, with espousal of the wrong causes. The measure of this moral transformation is the way in which our moral vocabulary is nervous about using "right" and "wrong." It prefers to talk of the "acceptable" and the "unacceptable." And it is not the case that having these attitudes is now an additional criterion of goodness; it is an actual replacement, as the career of President Clinton in one way illustrates. To fail the test of opinionative high-mindedness is to reveal oneself not as a cad or a thief, but as racist, sexist, elitist, and so on. In other words, morality, which used to be concerned with motive and with doing the right thing, has been politicized as orthodoxy of attitude. A great deal of the modish moral relativism of our time is merely a recognition that public policy has replaced morality, and that public policy is essentially circumstantial.

The Epicurean was also a moral revisionist, in that he focussed everything around pleasure, but he was certainly not a civic activist. And as someone marginal to the traditional society of Greece and Rome, he did not seriously change the real character of those societies. They were in any case in decline; Gilbert Murray once characterized Hellenic philosophy as expressing a "failure of nerve." But the modern detachment that concerns me has transformed not only morality but also the social reality itself.

Here the key idea is diversity—an ideal so much admired that governments have taken it up as the figurehead of their legislative endeavors. The diversity they legislate concerns social and sexual categories, and demands the inclusion of so-called "representatives" of each defined category in all major social endeavors. The real diversity of the past, by contrast, covered a vast range of activities (not legal categories) and resulted from the spontaneous responses

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Europeans made to constantly changing circumstances. Europeans were involved in so many particularities that the society itself was impenetrably complex. It was in recognition of this fact that the wisest rulers—and the originators of liberalism—affirmed that government must be limited to essential functions. They opposed any attempt to turn a state into a right-thinking regime.

The classical view of a human society pointed to its specialization. Menenius Aggrippa in *Coriolanus* tells the rebellious citizens of Rome that they are the belly in mutiny against the head, and everybody knew that an artisan was a totally different thing from a senator. The diversity of society was expressed in the limitations of its individual members. In the modern world, a farmer is not essentially different from a president, a judge from a builder—all are self-conscious reflections of the social whole, which all are endeavoring to make more perfect, where perfection is understood in the Epicurean sense of avoiding pain and banishing worry.

The modern diversity exemplified by governments forcing various institutions to include women, ethnic groups, the disabled, those with different sexual preferences, etc., in their membership is, of course, a semantic swindle. It is simply homogeneity by government *diktat*. A Dickensian world of genuine diversity has been replaced by blandness. One cause of the blandness is to be found in the fact that individuals, by detaching themselves from rootedness in particular traditions, now exhibit many of the features and experiences that previously were scattered over many individuals. What we are dealing with is a new semi-individualized diversity that is glib, facile, and inevitably shallow. What I mean may be best illustrated by the difficulty the Roman Catholic church has in recruiting priests, who must be celibate. At a time when it is thought that everybody must experience everything, institutions must change to accommodate the new form of personality. Karl Mannheim once suggested that intellectuals could be characterized (in terms of their detachment from particular interests) as "free floating." Today, most people are in one degree or another "free floating." We are all intellectuals now—though one cannot help remembering that you can be an intellectual without being intelligent.

Finally, what are the political implications of this new social and moral order? What does it mean for the survival of culture and the vitality of the values upon which it thrives? On the face of it, what concerns the Epicureans is the perfecting of community. Yet these rather flighty creatures with their passion for choice and their tiny capacity for facing challenges without choosing the easier option seem hopeless material for any kind of community at all. Community entails limitation, and the communities of the past were not only restrictive, but also ordered by rules with which people complied. The new Epicureans are not very good at rules, but they are very sensitive to messages, role models, public education programs, advertising, fictional heroes, and everything else that imitation and fashion feed upon. The ideal perfection dreamed of in utopian literature depended upon a community in which everyone shared the same attitude to things. Such unanimity is a condition for a society without moral and political conflict. We live in a world busy constructing the pattern of right attitudes that will orchestrate such a terrifying harmony. The new Epicureans, abstractly considered, are those who have unwittingly volunteered to be the materials for whatever is the next stage in the West's search for a perfect society.

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What did Kierkegaard want?

by Roger Kimball

Unfortunately, my life is far too subjunctive; would to God I had some indicative power.
—Journals, 1837

I sit and listen to the sounds in my inner being, the happy intimations of music, the deep, earnestness of the organ.
—Journals, 1843

He did not belong to reality, and yet he had much to do with it.
—Diary of the Seducer, 1843

What an impression Kierkegaard makes when you first read him! Especially, I must add, if that first time happens to occur in adolescence. How electrifying, at that time of life, to encounter the statement "Subjectivity is truth." Perhaps you had suspected that all along. But to have it indited there in black and white in the middle of a 576-page book of philosophy called *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* is something else again. (Actually, the book is called *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments: A Mimic-Pathetic-Dialectic Composition, An Existential Contribution*, a deliberately parodic title that somehow makes the proposition that "Subjectivity is truth" even more impressive.)

In one way or another, the explosive idea that "subjectivity is truth" is the guiding theme in Kierkegaard's thought. In an early journal entry—written in 1835, eleven years before the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* was published—the twenty-two-year-old Kierkegaard decided that

> What I really need is to get clear about *what I must do*, not what I must know, except insofar as knowledge must precede every act. . . . [T]he crucial thing is to find a truth which is truth *for me*, and to find *the idea for which I am willing to live and die.* Of what use would it be to me to discover a so-called objective truth, to work through the philosophical systems so that I could, if asked, make critical judgments about them, could point out the fallacies in each system; of what use would it be to me to be able to develop a theory of the state, . . . and constructing a world I did not live in but merely held up for others to see; of what use would it be to me to be able to formulate the meaning of Christianity . . . if it had no deeper meaning *for me and for my life?*

"Interpretive knowledge," he concludes, is all well and good but "*it must come alive in me* and *this* is what I now recognize as the most important of all."

This is potent stuff. Education is (or used to be) about getting beyond a private point of view and looking at things dispassionately, disinterestedly, objectively. And here comes a certified Great Thinker to tell you that what really counts is not dispassionateness but, on the contrary, *passion*. What our mediocre, bourgeois society needs, Kierkegaard says again and again, is more passion. In *The Present Age* (1846), he wrote that

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> our age is essentially one of understanding and reflection, without passion, momentarily bursting into enthusiasm, and shrewdly relapsing into repose. . . . Nowadays not even a suicide kills himself in desperation. Before taking the step he deliberates so long and so carefully that he literally chokes with thought. It is even questionable whether he ought to be called a suicide, since it is really thought which takes his life. He does not die *with* deliberation but *from* deliberation.

How far is Kierkegaard willing to press the claims of passion against reason? Apparently all the way. "If you will understand me aright," he explains in *Either/Or* (1843), his first major work, "I should like to say that in making a choice it is not so much a question of choosing the right as of the energy, the earnestness, the pathos with which one chooses."

Of course, that statement, like the statement "Subjectivity is truth"—like, indeed, many of Kierkegaard's most piquant observations—was delivered not by S. Kierkegaard himself, but by a pseudonym. Kierkegaard deployed a variety of pseudonyms as part of his program of "indirect communication." Seeking not so much to impart knowledge as to dispel illusion, Kierkegaard saw himself as a sort of spiritual therapist. His aim, he said, was to "deceive people into the truth," a goal that could be reached not directly, through argument, but indirectly, through the semi-fictional discourse of his pseudonyms. Kierkegaard eventually acknowledged the authorship of his pseudonymous works, but early on he took considerable pains to cover his tracks. He dealt with his printer through a third party. And although he was working practically around the clock in the mid-1840s, he would drop into the theater every night for five or ten minutes at intermission to foster his reputation as an idler-about-town, too frivolous to write books. Part of the fun in reading Kierkegaard is seeing how his various personae play off and criticize one another. But the fact that something is said by one of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms rather than *in propria persona* does not mean we can discount it. Kierkegaard used pseudonyms not only to dissimulate about the essentials of his thought but also to express them. Most of the really radical statements uttered by Kierkegaard's pseudonyms—"subjectivity is truth," for example—represent ideas that Kierkegaard himself endorsed.

Or endorsed most of the time. Kierkegaard was a deliberately slippery thinker, fearless when it came to contradiction. If he regularly touted the claims of passion against the dictates of reason, he also cautioned against misinterpreting "all my talk about pathos and passion to mean that I intend to sanction every uncircumcised immediacy, every unshaven passion."

That is a welcome concession. It is difficult, however, to know what to make of it. Leave aside the embarrassing question of what the tonsorial arts have to do with "immediacy" or passion. (The New Testament speaks about the "circumcision of the heart": what do you suppose a "circumcised immediacy" would look like?) The plain truth is that Kierkegaard never bothered to specify the conditions under which he thought pathos and passion justified a particular decision.

In *Fear and Trembling* (1843), one of his most famous books, Kierkegaard asks whether there is such a thing as a "teleological suspension of the ethical." That is a polysyllabic way of asking whether certain individuals are exempt from the moral strictures that bind the rest of us. Kierkegaard clearly thought, or hoped, that there were such individuals, individuals whose exceptional nature or religious calling put them beyond the claims of ordinary ethical commandments. Indeed, it is pretty clear that he believed he was one such exceptional individual.

Kierkegaard enlists the biblical story of Abraham and Isaac to illustrate his point. In order to test Abraham's allegiance, God tells him to take Isaac, his only son, and offer him up as a sacrifice. This Abraham sets out to do. He is just about to deliver the fatal blow when an angel stays his hand. God

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spares Isaac at the last moment. But what about Abraham? "Either," Kierkegaard wrote, "Abraham was every minute a murderer, or we are confronted by a paradox which is higher than all mediation."

Kierkegaard never actually comes right out and says "Abraham was exempt from the moral law; it would have been okay for him to murder Isaac." But he raises that possibility in a tantalizing way. Whatever his readers conclude about Abraham, they come away entertaining the flattering thought that, being individuals themselves, perhaps they, too, deserve to be exceptions.

Part of Kierkegaard's effort in *Fear and Trembling* is to remind us that important ethical choices can rarely be made by rational calculation alone. They almost always involve a non-rational element, what Kierkegaard famously called a "leap." If he overstated things, well, Kierkegaard specialized in a certain kind of overstatement. (He liked to refer to his work as a "corrective": going too far in one way because people had gone too far in the other.) In fact, what impresses one most about Kierkegaard is the pathos and passion he brought to his defense of pathos and passion. It was a performance designed to make the whole process of raising objections seem niggling and small-minded: we're talking about life here, not logical nicety! That, anyway, is how many people respond on a first reading.

Which is to say that Kierkegaard's reputation rests as much upon his style as upon the substance of his thought. He was an exceptionally prolix writer. (He would have had to be: he died at forty-two, yet managed to write some thirty-five books—most of them between 1842 and 1850—and fill twenty-two posthumously published volumes of journals.) He was also an unusually exuberant writer, by turns gripping, caustic, and sentimental. He could be extremely funny: "All men are bores," he wrote in "The Rotation Method" (a key essay in *Either/Or*).

> Surely no one will prove himself so great a bore as to contradict me in this. . . . The gods were bored, and so they created man. Adam was bored because he was alone, and so Eve was created. Thus boredom entered the world, and increased in proportion to the increase of population. Adam was bored alone; then Adam and Eve were bored together; then Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel were bored *en famille*; then the population of the world increased, and the peoples were bored *en masse*. To divert themselves they conceived the idea of constructing a tower high enough to reach the heavens. This idea is itself as boring as the tower was high, and constitutes a terrible proof of how boredom gained the upper hand.

Kierkegaard was very astute on the subject of boredom. He understood "the curious fact that those who do not bore themselves usually bore others, while those who bore themselves entertain others." He also understood that boredom could be far more than a passing mood of nameless dissatisfaction. In Kierkegaard's view, boredom is essentially a spiritual malaise, endemic wherever a purely naturalistic conception of man holds sway. Hence he defines boredom as "the daemonic side of pantheism." It is the dark side of a life devoted to amusement and pleasure. What happens when amusement palls and pleasure fails to please? Boredom yawns before one, a paralyzing abyss. (Compare Tolstoy's definition of boredom as "the desire for desires.") It is part of Kierkegaard's task to show that boredom can only be defeated by moving beyond what he calls the "aesthetic" conception of life, a mode of life unleavened by moral or religious engagement.

Kierkegaard was especially good at puncturing intellectual pomposity. "Like Leporello," he wrote in his journal, "learned literary men keep a list, but the point is what they lack; while Don Juan seduces girls and enjoys himself—Leporello notes down the time, the place, and a description of the girl." Kierkegaard reserved some of his best barbs for Hegel, the philosopher to whom he owed the most but whose pretensions to Absolute Knowledge (his confusion of "the

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logical with the existential") Kierkegaard found preposterous.

> If Hegel had written the whole of his *Logic* and in the Preface disclosed the fact that it was only a thought-experiment (in which however at many points he had steered clear of many things), he would have been the greatest thinker who ever lived. As it is, he is merely comic.

Hegel, Kierkegaard wrote, was like a man who had built a palace (the great Hegelian System) but lived in the guard house (ordinary life with its slings and arrows).

Kierkegaard expended a lot of ink, especially in his journals but also in some published works, explaining what he had attempted to accomplish as a writer. (*The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, written in 1848 but published posthumously, is devoted to nothing else.) In the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, the pseudonymous Johannes Climacus (drawing heavily on one of Kierkegaard's own journal entries) recalls how he resolved to become an author one Sunday while strolling in the Fredericksberg Gardens in Copenhagen:

> I sat and smoked my cigar until I lapsed into thought. . . . "You are going on," I said to myself, "to become an old man, without being anything and without really undertaking to do anything. . . . [W]herever you look about you . . . you see the many benefactors of the age who know how to benefit mankind by making life easier and easier, some by railways, others by omnibuses and steamboats, others by the telegraph, others by easily apprehended compendiums and short recitals of everything worth knowing, and finally the true benefactors of the age who make spiritual existence in virtue of thought easier and easier, yet more and more significant. And what are you doing?" . . . [S]uddenly this thought flashed through my mind: "You must do something, but inasmuch as with your limited capacities it will be impossible to make anything easier than it has become, you must . . . undertake to make something harder." This notion pleased me immensely. . . . I conceived it as my task to create difficulties everywhere.

That sudden reversal, that ambition "to create difficulties everywhere," is vintage Kierkegaard. It also shows the extent to which Kierkegaard modelled his activities on one of his culture heroes, Socrates. (Not for nothing was Kierkegaard's M.A. thesis called *The Concept of Irony: With Constant Reference to Socrates*.) In *The Apology*, Socrates described himself as the gadfly of Athens. His task was to sting the consciences of his interlocutors, persuading them that their chief concern ought to be not for their bodies or possessions "but for the highest welfare of their souls." Like Socrates, Kierkegaard set about using humor, learning, satire, homiletics—the full arsenal of his rhetoric—to sting the consciences of his fellow denizens of Copenhagen.

Just as Socrates gave up reading the scientific works of Anaxagoras because they told him nothing about the fundamental ethical reality of man, so Kierkegaard repudiated the rationalism of his culture, insisting that "the real subject is not the cognitive subject . . . [but] the ethically existing subject." In this sense, as the philosopher William Barrett has noted, Kierkegaard's motivation was essentially religious, not philosophical. "He never aimed at being a philosopher and all his philosophy was indeed incidental to his main purpose, to show what it means to be a Christian."

In *Irrational Man* (1958), his book about existentialism, Barrett began a sympathetic essay on Kierkegaard with this passage from the *Journals*: "It was intelligence and nothing else that had to be opposed. Presumably that is why I, who had the job, was armed with an immense intelligence." Using intelligence to battle overweening intelligence: that was how Kierkegaard understood his task. From one point of view this represented a mortification of the intellect. Kierkegaard clearly placed himself in the (heterodox) tradition of *credo quia absurdum*: "I believe because it is absurd." Is this excessively hard on reason? I think it is. But if Kierkegaard was right that

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"paradox" is "the source of the thinker's passion" and the supreme paradox "is the attempt to discover something thought cannot think" (two large *ifs*, admittedly), then his entire campaign can be understood as a vindication of the intellect in its highest vocation—in Kierkegaard's eyes, to serve the dictates of a faith not only beyond but also hostile to reason.

Given Kierkegaard's emphasis on decision, passion, and the individual, it is not surprising that his own formative decisions—the determining passions of his life, his contests to salvage individuality—should have stamped themselves so thoroughly on his work. To an unusual extent, Kierkegaard's biography is implicated in his teaching. It's a story that has been told many times. The first biography in English (1938) was by the indefatigable Walter Lowrie, the pious gent who was smitten by Kierkegaard, translated or helped translate many of his works, and introduced him to an English-speaking audience.

Since then Kierkegaard has developed from a cottage industry into a huge academic enterprise. More biographies, translations galore, studies beyond number. In a review of a selection from Kierkegaard's journals in 1966, John Updike wondered whether "the United States needs still more translations of Kierkegaard." But this was *avant le déluge*. Within a few years, Princeton had published English translations of most of his works. Then Howard and Edna Hong came along and proceeded to retranslate everything into academese, replete with notes—hundreds, in some cases thousands of them—scholarly commentaries and page references to the Danish edition. The seven fat volumes of Kierkegaard's *Journals* are impressive and useful. But Kierkegaard's *Edifying Discourses* became the barbarous *Upbuilding Discourses* (just in case anyone missed the hint of "edifice" in "edification"), a book on "Experimental Psychology" became a book about "Experimenting Psychology," etc. Curiously, the title *Philosophical Fragments* was retained, even though *Smuler* means "scraps" or "crumbs," not "fragments." How Kierkegaard would have savored it all! "And when I am dead," he wrote in 1854, "how busy all the assistant professors will be stripping me and mine, what competition to say the same thing, if possible, in more beautiful language."

The latest contribution to this flood is Alastair Hannay's biography,[1] a competent book by a veteran Kierkegaard scholar. Is it an advance on other biographies? Hannay has a surer grasp of philosophy than many people who write about Kierkegaard, and he has beavered away to uncover some minutiae about the master's student days. There are no revelations. Not that one expected any; the ground is too well trod. Kierkegaard was a tortured and tumultuous spirit, a fascinating "case." But outwardly, his life was uneventful. He never married, had no "career" in the ordinary sense, and never ventured further from his native Copenhagen than Berlin, which he visited three times, once for a few months to attend lectures by Friedrich Schelling (he wasn't impressed), twice on holiday.

Born in 1813, Kierkegaard was the seventh and last child of Michael and Ane (or Anne) Kierkegaard. Michael began life as a peasant. He grew up in the desolate heath country of Jutland, in western Denmark. He was formally in thrall to a local priest, whose land he worked. (Hence the name "Kierkegaard"—pronounced "Keer-ke-gore"—which means "churchyard" or "graveyard.") At twelve, he was sent to Copenhagen to apprentice in the clothing trade with his uncle. This was the break he needed. Smart, industrious, and lucky, he advanced quickly. At twenty-one, he was officially released from serfdom. He went into business on his own and, canny about money, made a small fortune, enough to retire at the age of forty, leaving his business in trust to a nephew. Michael's first wife died childless after two years of marriage. Ane, who had been a servant in their house,

1 *Kierkegaard: A Biography*, by Alastair Hannay; Cambridge University Press, 496 pages, $39.95.

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was promoted to wife sometime after she became pregnant by Michael. "In the premarriage settlement," Hannay notes, "Ane was denied the usual inheritance and became virtually Michael's employee, with a salary and a fixed annual housekeeping budget. There was no provision for her in the event of divorce, not even custody of the child."

Michael Kierkegaard was clearly a difficult man. As one commentator put it, he ran both his business and his family with an iron rod. He read widely, savored intellectual debate, and was afflicted by incurable religious melancholy. He never recovered from the fact that at the age of eight, cold and hungry while tending sheep one night on the Jutland heath, he cursed God for his fate. Walter Lowrie correctly remarked that Michael Kierkegaard's "profound melancholy impressed upon his religion a character of severity and gloom which was disastrous to his children." Hannay (who curiously never mentions Lowrie) says that although the Kierkegaard household was not "fundamentally unhappy" it was "certainly unhealthy" for a child. Kierkegaard agreed. "Humanly speaking," he wrote in a posthumously published work, he was "insanely" brought up.

Many of Kierkegaard's siblings died before he settled into adulthood. He was six when one brother died of a brain hemorrhage, nine when a sister died of nephritis. He was twenty when another brother died of consumption shortly after moving to America. His two remaining sisters died following childbirth in the early 1830s. By the time Michael Kierkegaard died, in 1838 at the age of eighty-two, there remained only Søren and his brother Peter to split the estate. Søren's share amounted to some 30,000 rixdalers, more than $400,000 by today's reckoning. It made him financially independent for the rest of his life—just. It is said that in October 1855, when Kierkegaard collapsed in the street and was taken to the hospital, it was after withdrawing the last of his capital from the bank. He died a few weeks later.

Although physically frail—he may have suffered from epilepsy—Kierkegaard was spiritually very much his father's son. He brooded. In the early 1830s, when he learned that his father had once cursed God and had had premarital relations with his mother, he was devastated. His first response seems to have been to embark on a period of mild dissipation. "May it not," he asked in his journal at this time, "be best to go through all the dissipations just to experience life?" A few years later, he wrote in his journal about a man who

> in an overwrought irresponsible state visits a prostitute. . . . Now he wants to get married. Then anxiety stirs. He is tortured day and night with the thought that he might possibly be a father, that somewhere in the world there could be a created being who owed his life to him.

Whatever Kierkegaard did, it allowed him the luxury of guilt. Even "a whole life devoted to God," he wrote in his journal in 1839, would "hardly suffice to atone for my youthful excesses." Kierkegaard was no easier on his father than on himself. In what is perhaps the last journal entry he made, in September 1855, he wrote that he came into the world through a "crime" and "against God's will" and that his punishment was to have lived "bereft of all lust for life."

Isn't this carrying things a little too far? Yes. But Kierkegaard carried everything too far. In part, one suspects, it was for effect. In an early journal entry, he wote about having been at a friend's where he was the life and soul of the party: "Everyone laughed and admired me—but I left, yes, that dash should be as long as the radii of the earth's orbit————and I wanted to shoot myself." As W. H. Auden noted in the first of his two essays on Kierkegaard, "occasionally . . . [he] carried on like a spiritual prima donna."

The real question is whether Kierkegaard ever climbed off stage, out of the limelight. In 1837, when he was twenty-four, Kierkegaard met and soon fell in love with Regine

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Olsen, then fourteen. They were engaged in 1840. The very next day, Kierkegaard wrote in his journal in 1849, he saw that he had made a dreadful mistake. He tortured himself, and Regine, too, presumably, for over a year. Then he definitively broke the engagement, sending back her ring with this letter:

> In order not to put more often to the test a thing which after all must be done, and which being done will supply the needed strength—let it then be done. Above all, forget him who writes this, forgive a man who, though he may be capable of something, is not capable of making a girl happy.

Kierkegaard must have thought well of this note. He not only inscribed a copy in his journal but also published it verbatim in his book *Stages on Life's Way* (1845).

In a letter to a friend, Kierkegaard wrote that "I do not turn her into poetry . . . I call myself to account." One wonders. Those are not mutually incompatible activities. Indeed, given Kierkegaard's insatiable appetite for self-scrutiny, not to say melodrama, one might say that he could find no more effective way of turning Regine into "poetry," into an occasion for reflection, than by "calling himself to account." I suspect she was right when she charged (as Kierkegaard reports): "So you have been playing a dreadful game with me." As Hannay comments, "far from escaping the thought of marriage, marriage was now something he could think rather than endure." And think it he did. Over the next several years, Kierkegaard proceeded to devote hundreds if not thousands of pages to showing how marriage is (as he put in the second volume of *Either/Or*) "the most profound form of the revelation of life." He regularly declared that "If I had had faith I would have stayed with Regine," and then enumerated all the reasons it was impossible. Kierkegaard later said it was due to Regine, melancholy, and his money that he became a writer. That is probably true. Before the break with Regine, he had written only an academic thesis and a few pamphlets (including, in 1838, a critical essay about his slightly older contemporary, Hans Christian Andersen). Regine—the idea of Regine—made Kierkegaard into Kierkegaard. But where did that leave Regine?

Primarily, it left her as a figment of Kierkegaard's imagination. She was elevated from being a woman to the post of inaccessible muse. In *Repetition* (1843), Kierkegaard portrayed a young man who thinks he is in love, but really is only in love with the idea of being in love. The girl is merely "the occasion that awakened the poetic in him." So it was with Kierkegaard himself. Just as Abraham had to sacrifice Isaac because of God's commandment, so he, Søren Aabye Kierkegaard, had to give up Regine—because of his "melancholy," because he was an exceptional, God-touched individual, maybe because he had visited a prostitute when he was twenty. Fortunately, Regine, after a bad patch, recovered herself, got engaged to someone with more red corpuscles than Kierkegaard, and was happily married. It seems pretty clear that Kierkegaard never really forgave her for that "betrayal."

What was Kierkegaard's most important contribution as a writer? There are numerous candidates for that prize. Some people would say his attack on the pretensions of Hegel's philosophy, others his affirmation of "inwardness" and subjectivity in religious life. My own contender is Kierkegaard's analysis of the "aesthetic mode of existence"—the effort to distance oneself from reality by reflection. Probably the most famous section of *Either/Or* is the long "Diary of the Seducer" at the end of volume one. It portrays a man whose "life had been an attempt to realize the task of living poetically" by playing at love. In one sense, this is a familiar literary gambit. In *The Importance of Being Earnest*, for example, Algernon declares that he doesn't see "anything romantic in proposing" marriage.

> It is very romantic to be in love. But there is nothing romantic about a definite proposal. Why, one may be accepted. One usually is, I believe. Then the excitement is all over. The very

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> essence of romance is uncertainty. If ever I get married, I'll certainly try to forget the fact.

But what Oscar Wilde offered as an entertaining fiction, Kierkegaard analyzed as a life project. At the center of that project is the effort to short-circuit reality by transforming it into the product of one's own imagination: experience, Kierkegaard wrote in "The Rotation Method," "is reduced to a sounding board for the soul's own music."

> The whole secret lies in arbitrariness. People usually think it is easy to be arbitrary, but it requires much study to succeed in being arbitrary so as not to lose oneself in it, but so as to derive satisfaction from it. One does not enjoy the immediate but something quite different which he arbitrarily imports into it. You go to see the middle of a play, you read the third part of a book. . . . By this means you insure yourself a very different kind of enjoyment from that which the author has been so kind as to plan for you. You enjoy something entirely accidental; you consider the whole of existence from this standpoint; let its reality be stranded thereon. . . . You transform something accidental into the absolute.

Kierkegaard was the supreme anatomist of the aesthetic mode of life. He was also one of its most accomplished practitioners. Or perhaps I should say "victims." Kierkegaard was quite right to criticize Hegel's philosophy for being a gorgeous intellectual construct that included everything but the individual. The irony is that Kierkegaard succumbed to the same thing at one remove. In a frequently quoted passage from his journal, Kierkegaard wrote that "it is perfectly true, as philosophers say, that life must be understood backwards. But they forget the other proposition, that it must be lived forwards." Kierkegaard didn't forget the second proposition; he simply could not bring himself to heed it.

Kierkegaard was always going on about the "really existing individual." But his self-obsession, his addiction to the aesthetic mode of existence, prevented him from practicing what he preached. He lacked, as he noted in an early journal entry, "indicative power." From one point of view, the spectacle Kierkegaard presents is tragic; his really was a blighted, supremely unhappy life. From another perspective, the spectacle he presents is comic in precisely the sense that he says Hegel's philosophy is comic: the disproportion between theory and reality is absolute.

The well-known Nietzsche scholar Walter Kaufmann was on to something when he exclaimed "How strange Kierkegaard is when he speaks of himself, and how similar to Dostoevsky's underground man—in content, style, and sensibility!" Both were in love with their own suffering. Pride prevented them from stooping to accept happiness. In 1846, Kierkegaard invited the *Corsair*, a scurrilous satirical paper, to attack him. The editor, hitherto conspicuously friendly to Kierkegaard, obliged with a nine-month campaign of caricature and vilification. In short order, he turned the philosopher into a public laughingstock. Kierkegaard savored and bemoaned the result. The idea, as Hannay notes, "was to begin a new chapter of self-induced torment with which, now that Regine had dropped into the background, to keep his mind and pen busy."

Kierkegaard was wont to see the chief difference between himself and Socrates as the difference between the pagan and the Christian worlds. There is that. But there is also the difference that Socrates set about his task with unfailing good humor while Kierkegaard was a model of anguish. Socrates spent his final hours in prison telling his friends to buck up. Kierkegaard wrote books with titles like *The Concept of Dread* and *The Sickness Unto Death* and spent his last months hectoring bishops in the established church of Denmark, telling them and their congregations that they were inadequate Christians. It is significant that there are about twice as many pages devoted to "suffering" in the English translation of Kierkegaard's *Journals* than to any other subject. Like the original Melancholy Dane,

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Kierkegaard accepted his task, but gloomily: "The time is out of joint. O cursèd spite/ That ever I was born to set it right."

Kierkegaard was a canny and provocative writer but ultimately a disappointing sage. Like many people who have delved into his work, W. H. Auden began with enthusiasm and ended disabused. In 1952, Auden wrote a vivid appreciation of Kierkegaard, not uncritical but plainly admiring. By 1968, in "A Knight of Doleful Countenance: Second Thoughts on Kierkegaard," Auden found his admiration decisively tempered:

> Like Pascal, Nietzsche, and Simone Weil, Kierkegaard is one of those writers whom it is very difficult to estimate justly. When one reads them for the first time, one is bowled over by their originality . . . and by the sharpness of their insights. . . . But with successive readings one's doubts grow, one begins to react against their overemphasis on one aspect of the truth at the expense of all the others, and one's first enthusiasm may all too easily turn to an equally exaggerated aversion. Of all such writers, one might say that one cannot imagine them as children. The more we read them, the more we become aware that something has gone badly wrong with their affective life; . . . it is not only impossible to imagine one of them as a happy husband or wife, it is impossible to imagine their having a single intimate friend to whom they could open their hearts.

There is, Auden went on to observe, something of the Manichee about Kierkegaard: not intellectually but in feeling, in sensibility. "Though he would never have . . . asserted that matter was created by an Evil Spirit, one does not feel in his writings the sense that, whatever sorrows and sufferings a man may have to endure, it is nevertheless a miraculous blessing to be alive." God made the world and saw that it was good: that is an element of orthodox teaching that is conspicuously downplayed in Kierkegaard's thought. Indeed, by the end of his life, in his attack upon what he contemptuously called "Christendom," Kierkegaard veered perilously close to world-denying religious fanaticism. "To love God," he wrote in 1854, "is impossible without hating what is human." A gentler—one might say "more Christian"—form of Christianity teaches that by loving what is human one does honor to God.

Kierkegaard insisted that "purity of heart is to will one thing." But is that really the case? Or would it be truer to say that, being human with human weaknesses and human frailty, the effort to "will *one* thing" cannot help but be a project of pride? Auden quotes this marvelous passage from Dietrich Bonhoeffer:

> We should love God eternally with our whole hearts, yet not so as to compromise or diminish our earthly affections, but as a kind of cantus firmus to which the other melodies of life provide the counterpoint. Earthly affection is one of these contrapuntal themes, a theme which enjoys autonomy of its own.

Kierkegaard was deaf to those other melodies—or, more accurately, he heard them but refused to acknowledge the pertinence of their charm. Bonhoeffer provides one sort of antidote to Kierkegaard's unhealthy rigorism. Another is provided by Thomas Aquinas. Granting that too much self-love was a bad thing, Aquinas nevertheless affirmed that "well-ordered self-love, whereby man desires a fitting good for himself, is right and natural." Aquinas is also a better guide to the place of reason in life and faith. Kierkegaard could not bring himself to embrace the fruits of "well-ordered self-love," largely, I believe, because he was too self-absorbed to permit the compromise with reality that enjoyment of those fruits requires. At the end of his life, Kierkegaard asked, "What do I want? Quite simply: I want honesty. . . . I am not Christian severity as opposed to Christian leniency. . . . I am . . . human honesty." But that declaration was disingenuous. What Kierkegaard wanted was not human honesty but inhuman mortification—one result, perhaps, of believing that subjectivity is truth.

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The exemplar: Ignazio Silone

by David Pryce-Jones

Communism, though little discussed now and loitering in hidden garrets on miserable straw pallets, is the dark hero destined for a great, if temporary, role in the modern tragedy.
—Heinrich Heine, June 20, 1842

Ignazio Silone liked to say that every author writes different versions of the one book singular to him. In his own case, this book was the novel *Fontamara*, published inauspiciously in Switzerland in 1933. At the time Silone was poor, in exile, solitary, and on top of everything else suffering, as a result of consumption, from chronic ill-health. A couple of years earlier, he had broken with the Italian Communist party. He had been one of its eight most senior leaders. Palmiro Togliatti, the party's secretary general and a subtle interpreter of Stalin's every whim, had himself come to Switzerland to warn Silone that only someone of great strength could survive the break with the party. Silone was one such; he persisted and went on to literary fame.

Fontamara is a village in the Marsica region of the Abruzzi—not so far from Rome—modelled closely, perhaps exactly, on Fucino where Silone himself had been born in 1900, the child of a small landholder. His real name was Secondino Tranquilli; Ignazio Silone was only one of a number of pseudonyms he adopted in the course of his career. When he was fifteen, his whole family, with the exception of his younger brother Romolo, was killed in an earthquake. In its aftermath, he saw a relation stealing the wallet from the corpse of one of the victims. Once coming out of church, he had been present when a minor aristocrat set his dog on a seamstress. When she took this man to court, the magistrate found against her and made her pay costs. How was a human being to come to terms with violence, great or small, natural or unnatural? Silone received a religious education and repaid it in his fiction with more than one characterization of priests as humble to the point of saintliness. His own idealistic and rather priestly nature had its roots in the unhappiness, hardship, and injustice in which he had grown up.

Soon after the First World War, the Italian socialists split, and the young Silone joined the breakaway Communist faction almost at once. Quickly making a name for himself, he was sent to work for the Comintern in Spain and Germany. In 1927 Mussolini's secret police, the OVRA, virtually destroyed the party organization, whereupon Silone went underground, adopting some of his several pseudonyms. But that same year, he was present in Moscow when Stalin rigged the vote to expel Trotsky from the party as a prelude to the eventual exile and murder of this rival. Silone refused to vote on the issue as instructed. By now, he had learnt all he needed to know of both Communism and fascism in action, and he was to spend the rest of his life defending humane values against totalitarianism.

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A writer of that generation could still use his background to conjure up a whole world that would be true to itself and yet unfamiliar, as in the novels of François Mauriac or Isaac Bashevis Singer. Fontamara is just such a self-contained microcosm, with a prince as its absentee landlord, devious lawyers, assorted busybodies, and above all peasants or *cafoni*, men and women who have no choice but to accept injustice and fate with as much wisdom and humor as they can muster. Nothing much has ever changed in their lives, and they are unaware of the political calamity about to strike. Mussolini is nowhere mentioned in the novel, and the word "*fascisti*" appears only once by my count. "Those men in black shirts" arrive by night, and in groups, "evil, malicious, treacherous." A series of brilliantly plotted events, complete with trickery and misunderstanding, leads to confrontation and finally the massacre of innocent villagers. "What are we to do?," the survivors ask, in the novel's closing words.

Anti-fascist and pro-Communist fiction in the Thirties as a rule staked out ideological positions and was therefore still-born, today ludicrous as literature. *Fontamara* is free from propaganda; its drama is allowed to speak for itself and therefore depicts a generalized struggle of good and evil. That is its strength. At the time, it was not clear whether Mussolini would align himself with the democracies or with Hitler. The left immediately used *Fontamara* to recruit for the anti-fascist cause. Leon Trotsky and Karl Radek were among its admirers. Graham Greene, whose own early novels were full of "the usual left-wing scenery" as George Orwell put it, in a review described *Fontamara* as "the most moving account of Fascist barbarity I have yet read." It was a great deal more than so reduced a schema implies. During the war, in an act of black propaganda, the Allies flooded Italy with reprints, incidentally sealing Silone's reputation as Italy's foremost writer.

Building on this first novel, Silone wrote *Bread and Wine* (1937) and *The Seed Beneath the Snow* (1941), comprising what is known as *The Abruzzo Trilogy*, which has been newly reissued by Vermont's Steerforth Press.[1] In the trilogy, the character of Pietro Spina is evidently a projection of Silone himself, a Communist on the run who disguises himself as a priest. He believes himself to be organizing a revolution, but the villagers take him to be a genuinely holy self-denying man of God. "Honor poverty and friendship," says Pietro in a sentence that amounts to the moral of the trilogy, "and be proud." But he also observes of himself, troublingly, "I'm not one of those whose kingdom is of this world." In the manner of Gogol, new characters are constantly popping up to hold the center of the stage for a moment, and wonderfully lively they are too. To give just one example of the idiosyncrasy and economy of his style, Silone describes an old maid: "She had the mauve-green coloring of persons who can't stand flies." But the trilogy seems slowly to lose its way in diffusion and Silone's own self-examination, sailing on like a great liner unable to put into harbor.

As the Cold War set in, Silone began employing the phrase "ex" for former Communists. In an essay in the famous and influential collection *The God That Failed* (1949), he explained how Exes like himself had originally hoped to redress social wrongs. Instead he had found that in the Communist movement "a vocation for tyranny nestled next to the desire for liberty." The Soviet Union was "a system of oppression and exploitation of a new kind." He felt "an urgent need to testify." Silone participated in the Congress for Cultural Freedom and was an editorial advisor for its Italian publication, *Tempo Presente*. Like his contemporary Primo Levi, he seemed to certify that it was possible to live through the ideologies and horrors of the century and emerge as a human being through force of will and love of the truth.

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1 *The Abruzzo Trilogy*, by Ignazio Silone, translated by Eric Mosbacher; Steerforth Italia, 800 pages, $27.

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One of his friends, Iris Origo, herself a perceptive and high-minded writer, wrote a biographical sketch of him, to which she gave the title "A Study in Integrity." His greatness, she thought, lay in his "persistent pre-occupation with human suffering." He was pale, slight—as though he did not want to take up more space than was his due—and evidently introspective. When once I had lunch with him, all those years ago on a summer day in Rome, I was struck that he kept the three buttons of his suit formally, protectively, done up. "He carried within him wounds," Iris Origo wrote, "which he knew to be unhealable."

Expiring in its final few incarnations, such as China, Cuba, or North Korea, the experiment of Communism is set to pass into history for what it was, a tide of oppression and murder so immense that nothing like it had ever before happened, and nothing like it should ever happen again. There remain intellectuals in the West, nonetheless, who argue that the evils of "really existing" Communism in practice do nothing to vitiate the underlying dogma. Not many in number, this is the last moment for such intellectuals to salvage the mystique of Communism, and leave it loitering in the garret of history for some future role.

The vilification and marginalization of anti-Communists is the best means available to this end. Long ago, the climate of opinion was put in place whereby anyone and everyone opposed to Communism was beyond the pale. Whether far-fetched or trivial, accusations were conjured up to pick off opponents and suppress their dissent. Albert Camus, for instance, could be written off as a reactionary when he failed to support the Moscow-backed Algerian revolution because his mother was a *pied noir* still living in Algeria. George Orwell and Arthur Koestler were labelled traitors to humanity, no less, and party publications and meetings used to call regularly for death sentences to be passed on them. Defamation continues posthumously. At the suggestion of a friend with connections to British intelligence, it has lately been revealed, Orwell wrote out a list of Communist and fellow-traveling intellectuals. Some might think that this was an obligation at the onset of the Cold War, but left-wing commentators at once trashed him as a police stooge. Koestler, according to his latest biographer, was a serial rapist. By definition, the opinions of such delinquents on any subject must be permanently discredited.

And now it is the turn of Ignazio Silone. Two Italian academics, Dario Biocca and Mauro Canali, in recent years have published a book and various subsequent essays accusing him of being a fascist spy and denouncing Communists to Mussolini's secret police. In the light of documents they have discovered in the archives, they claim that Silone was a regular informant of a senior OVRA official by the name of Guido Bellone. Under the pseudonym *Silvestri*, he is accused of passing on details about other clandestine Communists, their whereabouts and travel plans, over a period starting in 1923 and perhaps even earlier. On April 13, 1930, while he was breaking with Communism, he wrote to Bellone that he found himself "at a moment of truth," when he had either to abandon active politics or kill himself: "I cannot carry on living ambiguously." Also in the official files is a correspondence from October 1937 in which Mussolini asks OVRA for information compromising to Silone and his anti-fascist novels. The OVRA reply states that at one moment in the past Silone "seemed to have repented of his anti-fascist past and had attempted a rapprochement with the Italian authorities." Nothing further developed, however, from this exchange.

In Italy, as elsewhere in continental Europe, the anti-fascist legacy is exaggerated to serve as a buttress to national self-respect. If Silone really were a police informer and not the honest man he seemed so patently to be from his writings and his conduct, then the anti-fascist legacy is compromised. Today's reconstructed fascists stand to gain from that, but so do the

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Communists, reconstructed or not, for they can claim that Silone was a fraud who forfeited all right to be taken seriously. Throughout the media, gleeful extremists have used Biocca and Canali's work to stamp on his reputation. The controversy has seemed factitious, not to say incredible. The doyen of Italian journalists, Indro Montanelli, summed it up when he countered that "even if Silone himself rose up from his tomb to tell me these accusations were true, I would still not believe them."

A new book, *Processo a Silone*, goes over all the evidence.[2] Declared, even militant, socialists in the Pietro Nenni tradition, the three authors, Giuseppe Tamburrano, Gianna Granati, and Alfonso Isinelli, are out to refute Biocca and Canali once and for all. The book's preface immediately questions whether Silone's two critics have been displaying "the slap-dash reading typical of journalists, or 'ideological' prejudice." The tone is outright polemical. At times, assertion is met with counter-assertion, leaving the reader is something of a quandary. Nonetheless, there are some firm markers.

Silone did indeed have contact with Bellone, maybe even as early as 1919, at the outset of his political commitment. In the book's main section, Tamburrano analyzes their rather shadowy relationship. What, if anything, happened between them in the early 1920s remains obscure. Here was a game, he observes, in which we cannot be sure who was the cat, who the mouse. A quite different and highly personal drama began when Silone's brother Romolo was arrested on a charge of having placed the bomb that exploded in the Milan Trade Fair in April 1928, killing eighteen people. To this day, the culprit and the motive remain unknown. Romolo was judged innocent. But for the offense of going under a false identity and possessing other papers thought to be compromising, he was sentenced to a long term in prison. Probably not a formal party member, Romolo seems to have romanticized Communism and the example of his brother. Tortured in prison, he wrote to ask his brother for help. Another consumptive, he was soon to die in prison.

Out of a sense of responsibility and guilt, Silone sent a telegram to Bellone to find out whether anything could be done for his brother. Older than Silone, Bellone had started his police work before the First World War and rose to be General Inspector of Public Security in Rome, finally dying in 1948 as the inmate of an lunatic asylum. Silone found him decent enough and told him so. But Bellone saw the opportunity for blackmail. Something could be done for Romolo if Silone were to furnish information about the Communist party and its organization. Tamburrano concedes that in the months between Romolo's imprisonment and the final letter of 13 April 1930 Silone did pass "generic" information to Bellone, in other words knowledge that was already widely available. The proper response to Silone's dealings with Bellone, Tamburrano argues passionately, is pity for the plight into which Romolo had got him, and admiration for the way he emerged unscathed.

In *The Abruzzo Trilogy* a character by the name of Murica is a Communist who turns to denunciation of his comrades. Silone treats Murica with understanding, which allows Biocca and Canali to infer that Silone was writing about himself. "Proof" of that caliber quickly earns inverted commas from Tamburrano. He also notes that police files contain many lists of informers, and Silone's name features on none of them. Is it likely that Bellone ran Silone as his own agent without informing anyone else in the OVRA hierarchy? But his best point derives from the Mussolini request in 1937 for material with which to blacken Silone as an anti-fascist, and the OVRA response that he had once attempted a rapprochement with the authorities. By then, Mussolini was sending arms to Franco in the Spanish Civil War,

2 *Processo a Silone*, by Giuseppe Tamburrano, Gianna Granati, and Alfonso Isinelli; Piero Lacaita Editore, 161 pages, 20,000 lire.

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and Italian Communists including Togliatti were active on the Republican side. Had Bellone really extracted compromising material, this was the moment to go public with it, demonstrating that Communists could not be trusted. Nothing of the kind happened. The OVRA reponse also explicitly stated that Silone had approached the secret police "with the intention of helping his brother."

It is essential to Biocca and Canali's case against Silone to establish that he had an ongoing relationship with Bellone through the early Twenties, and that the intervention on behalf of Romolo was not the response to a sudden crisis but the calling-in of a favor due. To that end, they have published quite a lengthy series of documents discovered in the police files, dated between 1923 and 1927. These are all anonymous letters giving details about the whereabouts of Communists and their proposed movements across frontiers. A "T" crops up, and they assume that the initial stands for his real name of Tranquilli. In their view, the dates of the letters, and the places where they were written, correspond to Silone's movements, and so damn him completely as a long-term informer.

This is all speculation, Tamburrano now replies, and it ought to be rejected wholesale. These letters are incomplete, full of gaps, and scribbled all over so that they are hard to decipher. In their separate contributions, in effect scholarly appendices, Gianna Granati and Alfonso Isinelli examine the two critics' interpretation of these letters, one by one. It is easy to show that Biocca and Canale have made all manner of sloppy errors and that Silone could have been be in the right city to write some of these letters on some of the dates, but by no means all of them.

The case is not proven, as they say on doubtful occasions in Scottish courts, but common sense suggests that Tamburrano and his colleagues are right, and Silone deserves sympathy for helping his brother at a certain cost to himself. Biocca and Canali make no allowance for the totalitarian context, but strikingly and invariably place the ugliest possible interpretation on everything to do with Silone. Whatever its source, their animus is pointless. If beneath appearances, Silone was a real secret police informer, then that would be only a comment on the hateful demands totalitarianism makes on the individual—or to put it another way, some wounds to the human soul go deep, too deep to be understood, let alone healable. Outwardly Silone lived his life as an anti-fascist and an anti-Communist. The personal example stands. The writing speaks for itself.

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The accomplishment of Edith Wharton

by Brooke Allen

Edith Wharton counted her friendship with Henry James as the crown jewel of her career, but it just might have been a curse. During her lifetime she was labeled, inaccurately, as a disciple of James, an apprentice who inevitably fell short of the Master. Since her death she has continued to be compared with him, never to her advantage. Like her contemporary Georges Braque, she always comes in a poor second.

Wharton idolized James, to be sure, but she had a real sense of her own power as an author and of her artistic strengths, which were not his, and she chafed at the persistent coupling of her name with her friend's. "The continued cry that I am an echo of Mr. James (whose books of the last ten years I can't read, much as I delight in the man) . . . makes me feel rather hopeless," she complained in 1904. It is true that the two writers had some obvious points in common: they were both upper-crust East Coast Americans who tended to write about their own kind; they both transplanted themselves to Europe in middle age but continued to be obsessed with their native country, despising its narrow culture but never ceasing to be haunted by its crude beauties.

Still, the differences between Wharton and James were more marked than the similarities. Many of James's tics and foibles, attractive to some readers and alienating to others, displeased his "disciple" and were avoided by her. Unlike James, Wharton was never precious or arch, and she usually preferred the straight route to the circuitous one. Her style is more decided, more "masculine" perhaps, than his. And she instinctively rejected his obsession with fictional structure, which she felt was too often achieved at the expense of truth and life.

> His latest novels, for all their profound moral beauty, seemed to me more and more lacking an atmosphere, more and more severed from that thick nourishing human air in which we all live and move. . . . [H]is stage was cleared like that of the Théâtre Français in the good old days when no chair or table was introduced that was not *relevant to the action*.

No one could accuse Wharton of isolating her characters in such a rarefied atmosphere. She was expert, by nature and by training, at sensing the exact significance of every external detail. Each of her characters has his place within an intricate social web; each is circumscribed within a physical setting that tells us a great deal about who he is—or, just as often, who he is not. Here, for instance, is a woman who has just discovered that her second marriage, as her first had, is failing:

> Her eyes wandered about the familiar drawing-room which had been the scene of so many of their evening confidences. The shaded lamps, the quiet-coloured walls hung with mezzotints, the pale spring flowers scattered

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> here and there in Venice glasses and bowls of old Sèvres, recalled, she hardly knew why, the apartment in which the evenings of her first marriage had been passed—a wilderness of rosewood and upholstery, with a picture of a Roman peasant above the mantelpiece, and a Greek slave in "statuary marble" between the folding-doors of the back drawing-room. It was a room with which she had never been able to establish any closer relation than that between a traveler and a railway station; and now, as she looked about at the surroundings which stood for her deepest affinities—the room for which she had left that other room—she was startled by the same sense of strangeness and unfamiliarity. The prints, the flowers, the subdued tones of the old porcelains, seemed to typify a superficial refinement which had no relation to the deeper significance of life.

This is an exquisite example of emotional shorthand. So is a moment in Wharton's story "The Other Two" (1904) where a man meeting his wife's first husband is struck not so much by his person as by one particular garment:

> It was grotesquely uppermost in Waythorn's mind that Haskett had worn a made-up tie attached with an elastic. Why should that ridiculous detail symbolize the whole man? Waythorn was exasperated by his own paltriness, but the fact of the tie expanded, forced itself on him, became as it were the key to Alice's past.

The very skill with which Wharton could give a garment or an object psychological meaning has to some extent told against her: for some readers, she is the supreme poet of décor, a second-rate art if indeed it qualifies as art at all. To this type of reader, the fact that she was a worldly woman—more than worldly: a grande dame, a chatelaine, the author of a perennially popular book on interior decoration—makes her automatically suspect. What's more, she was a fluent, facile writer, the author of numerous best-sellers. Again the contrast with James, the prototypical ivory-tower, temple-of-art man, is unavoidable.

But the fact is that Wharton was one of the most important American writers, and she was important "during a period," as Edmund Wilson pointed out after her death, "say, 1905–1917—when there were few American writers worth reading." What is more, her books do not date. That fact is hard to account for, since her two best novels, *The House of Mirth* and *The Age of Innocence*, deal largely with codes of manners that were already dead or dying when she wrote about them. Indeed, by the beginning of the First World War, "what had seemed unalterable rules of conduct" in Wharton's nineteenth-century youth had already become, as she put it, "as quaintly arbitrary as the domestic rites of the Pharaohs." But even now, when all rules of conduct have apparently been thrown to the winds, the books work: they have an interior logic and an emotional coherence that utterly convince.

Yet it is true that Wharton never became a "great" writer on the level of James. It was not her intelligence that fell short, nor her descriptive powers, her humor, her command of the language. Perhaps her limitations lay essentially in the darkness of her vision; she showed life's tragedy and its deadening compromises but very seldom its corresponding and essential beauty. There is humor and a healthy respect for sensual pleasure in her work, but no joy, no sublimity, no God, not even anything that could qualify as a God-substitute.

Not that beauty is not present in Wharton's fiction: it is everywhere, it positively palpitates; but Wharton mistrusts it. No one who has read *The Age of Innocence*, for example, can forget the description of May Welland and the other Newport *belles* pulling back their bows in the annual archery competition. May's iridescence, though, is a negative quality, her purity a blankness that deflects rather than absorbs love and life. It is uncompromised ignorance rather than compromised knowledge. Thus the tarnished Ellen Olenska is capable of mor-

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al beauty, while the untarnished May is not.

When we look beneath the high surface gloss of Wharton's world, we see a marketplace, pure and simple. Hers is an almost purely economic conception of life: every good thing has its price, and the greater the good, the higher the price. The vast majority of us are unwilling to pay for our happiness and must make do with the unappetizing leftovers that are all we feel we can afford. "Life is not a matter of abstract principles," Wharton wrote in her 1907 novel *The Fruit of the Tree*, "but a succession of pitiful compromises with fate, of concessions to old traditions, old beliefs, old tragedies, old failures." It is a hopeless creed, some might say a cynical one.

There is a good reason why Wharton's great subject turned out to be the world of her youth, the rigidly stratified society of "old New York" and its invasion by the new industrial fortunes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Its complicated social code provided a series of rules which were both inflexible and, as Wharton noted, perfectly arbitrary; to break them, in other words, was a matter not only of moral strength but also of being able to make the imaginative leap: to conceive of American society and its code as what it was, a small and rather absurd corner of a large and infinitely interesting world. The tragedy does not lie in the fact that a Newland Archer or a Lily Bart gives up a chance of love and freedom, but in the worthlessness and futility of what they choose instead: in Archer's case, an enveloping nullity that is personal as well as social; in Lily's, a luxurious, degrading servitude. (Although in the end Lily, of course, proved herself a little too good for that life by passively rejecting it.)

The consensus seems to be that Wharton mellowed as she aged, and that by the time she wrote *The Age of Innocence* (1920) and her memoir, *A Backward Glance* (1934), she had come to regret the lost world of her youth. The citation that is usually trotted out in support of this theory is from *A Backward Glance*:

> When I was young it used to seem to me that the group in which I grew up was like an empty vessel into which no new wine would ever again be poured. Now I see that one of its uses lay in preserving a few drops of an old vintage too rare to be savoured by a youthful palate; and I should like to atone for my unappreciativeness by trying to revive that faint fragrance.

If nostalgia there was, however, it was about one part nostalgia to ten parts rage and disgust. Looked at carefully, *The Age of Innocence* is hard to see as anything but a blistering indictment of a repressive and mediocre society whose denizens sacrificed their young to the same ossified standards that had blighted their own lives: a world where "'bad manners' were the supreme offence," literature was avoided out of "an awe-struck dread of the intellectual effort that might be required" in its perusal, there was "a blind dread of innovation, an instinctive shrinking from responsibility," and "even the acquiring of money had ceased to interest." Ellen Olenska, who is strong, leaves New York for Paris (as Wharton herself had done); Newland Archer, who is weak, stays, and over the years dwindles into a sad sort of half-person. In reading Wharton's description of her father, who died when she was twenty, it is impossible not to recognize one source for Archer: "I have wondered . . . what cravings had once germinated in him, and what manner of man he was really meant to be. That he was a lonely one, haunted by something always unexpressed and unattained, I am sure."

Despite an extramarital affair and a divorce, Wharton remained a relatively conventional woman throughout her life and even, by some standards, a conservative one. Still, it is important to remember that she was probably, as Irving Howe noted, "the American novelist least merciful in her treatment of the rich," and in her fiction she is always, always on the side of the individual who rebels, however feebly, against imprisoning social norms.

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Wharton produced some forty volumes of fiction, poetry, and nonfiction during her long career, but most readers today are only familiar with *The House of Mirth*, *The Age of Innocence*, *Ethan Frome* and possibly *The Custom of the Country* and *Summer*. The Library of America has recently published Wharton's sixty-seven short stories in two volumes.[1] This is a marvelous and very important project, for Wharton's better short fiction is every bit as rewarding as her best novels: its general quality is remarkably high, her range in both manner and subject is broad, and her taut, epigrammatic style seems especially suited to the short form.

Wharton wrote her stories for magazines, and collections of them were published in a series of individual volumes between 1899 and 1936. They show a remarkable technical skill combined with a freedom and playfulness, a willingness to experiment with styles and genres, that will delight readers who are familiar only with the major novels. Wharton's work ranged from stories like the famous "Roman Fever" (1934), a model of the well-made, tightly controlled, classic tale as practiced by writers like O. Henry, to long, episodic and more complex pieces like "The Touchstone" (1900) and "Bunner Sisters" (begun in the early 1890s, but not published until 1916). She was at home writing grimly realistic pieces, light social comedy, even ghost stories. Only her occasional attempts at historical fiction were an unqualified flop.

Much has recently been made of the autobiographical elements in Wharton's short stories. Wharton's emotional life was not a particularly happy one, but with characteristic energy and resolve she made the best of a rather bad bargain. Eager to escape the enveloping aura of her cold, fashionable mother, Wharton married at the age of twenty-three without ever having had the facts of life explained to her. She turned out to be both sexually and intellectually incompatible with Teddy Wharton, a kind man, typical of his class, whose interests extended to horses, dogs, and sailboats but not much farther.

In 1907 she fell in love with Morton Fullerton, an American then working as the Paris correspondent for the London *Times*. Fullerton, three years her junior, had already enjoyed a colorful love life: he had many admirers of both sexes, including Henry James. Wharton and Fullerton had an affair which lasted until 1910, a fact not known to the public until the publication of R. W. B. Lewis's biography of Wharton in 1975. The other love of her life was her intimate friend Walter Berry, an American lawyer and aesthete: her feelings for him were more durable than they were for Fullerton, but were not reciprocated. It seems fairly certain that the ascetic, intellectual Berry was a homosexual (though not perhaps a practicing one); he has been proposed, all too convincingly, as the inspiration for such vacillating, unsatisfactory Wharton men as Lawrence Selden and Newland Archer. Wharton, a woman who seldom deviated from the conventions of her caste (except in the rather basic act of having become a writer in the first place) stuck with her unloved husband for thirty years, until his recurring bouts of mania and depression made a life in common all but impossible: they divorced in 1913, and after that Wharton lived primarily in France.

Echoes of this drama certainly reverberate in Wharton's short fiction, as they do in her novels. The imprisonment of an unsatisfactory marriage is a frequent theme, and often that imprisonment reflects the larger and more diffuse imprisonment of a repressive society. It is an interesting fact that the prisoner is not always, or even usually, a woman; Wharton is at least as comfortable with the masculine as with the feminine point of view. Edmund Wilson, in fact, has proposed that, although "there are no first-rate men in these novels," her men are nonetheless more sympathetic than her women: "the typical masculine figure in

1 *Collected Stories* by Edith Wharton, edited by Maureen Howard; Library of America; *Volume 1: 1891–1910* (929 pages, $35), *Volume 2: 1911–1937* (848 pages, $35).

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Edith Wharton's fiction is a man set apart from his neighbors by education, intellect, and feeling, but lacking the force or the courage to impose himself or to get away. . . . [T]hese men are usually captured and dominated by women of conventional morals and middle-class ideals." This scenario, clearly, resembles the marriage of Wharton's parents rather than her own. But there are examples, especially in the short stories, of the opposite case, the sensitive and imaginative female trapped in a fatal relationship with an emotionally crude man. There is Nora Fenway, for example, in *Atrophy*, whose husband means nothing to her and her lover, Christopher, everything: she rushes to Christopher's house in the country when she hears he is dying, but has been too long enslaved by good breeding and social convention to do what she longs to do, which is to force her way past his watchdog of a sister and go to his side.

There is also Christine Ansley in "Joy in the House," an errant wife who returns to her forgiving husband and finds him—well, a little too forgiving: in other words, too bloodless. And there is Margaret Ransom, the faded wife of a pompous New England college professor who falls in love with a young Englishman in the beautiful, ambiguous story "The Pretext" (1908). Finally, there is the dead but very present Margaret Aubyn in "The Touchstone," one of Wharton's most complex and interesting stories if not, in the end, a wholly successful one. Mrs. Aubyn, a great writer, loved for many years Stephen Glennard, a perfectly ordinary young man. He was not in love with her and was clearly unworthy of her love, as even he was compelled to admit: "To have been loved by the most brilliant woman of her day, and to have been incapable of loving her, seemed to him, in looking back, derisive evidence of his limitations."

Wharton is at her best and most subtle in tracing, through the inconstant Glennard's memories, the course of their uneasy affair, if affair it can be called. Glennard tried to return her love, but it was a feeble effort: "It was not that she bored him; she did what was infinitely worse—she made him feel his inferiority." His vanity in his conquest, however, made him unwilling to sever the tie, and they drifted along unhappily, with Mrs. Aubyn frustrated at having her deepest thoughts deflected by his unreceptive intelligence, and Glennard oppressed and even humiliated by "her persistence in forcing her superabundance of thought and emotion into the shallow receptacle of his sympathy."

After Mrs. Aubyn's death Glennard falls in love with Alexa Trent, a person as different from the dead woman as anyone could possibly be: she is beautiful, placid, unintellectual, and above all, silent. They don't have enough money to marry, until Glennard realizes that he possesses a potential diamond mine in the form of Mrs. Aubyn's love letters. He sells them to a publisher, then marries and sets up house on the proceeds. Before long, though, things begin to go wrong. All of society, and most significantly his wife, read the hugely popular letters, praise the author, and condemn the anonymous and clearly second-rate man to whom they were addressed. Worse, Glennard begins to suspect his wife of being a beautiful blank and to mourn Mrs. Aubyn after the fact, even to fall in love with her, or to think that he has.

Wharton deftly conveys the ironies of the situation, the psychological shifts, the poignant, abject inadequacy of Glennard's character—and then, nearly on the last page, she fails: the story's ending is discordant, sentimental, totally sham. What a disappointment! Still, in spite of the final gaffe, "The Touchstone" is one of the most interesting and worthwhile of Wharton's stories.

Wharton tended to construct her tales around unhappy marriages, but the nature of the unhappy marriage, its constraints and possibilities, changed radically during the course of her career, and she had to adjust her themes accordingly. During her youth divorce was unthinkable; as she became middle-aged it began to be possible, even among the die-hards of her own caste; in

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her old age it was quite common. The stories reflect the changing standards with humor and, for those born too soon to benefit from society's steadily loosening grip, with an almost passionate pity. The early "Souls Belated" (published in 1899) provides a darkly humorous glimpse of a young couple who have left their spouses and run away together: their plight shows how very unfit most people are to live outside of conventional society. Lydia Tillotson and Ralph Gannett fetch up at an Italian resort hotel with its predictable little Anglo-American circle of guests. The young couple, who have thought themselves ready to give up the world for one another and to live as romantic renegades, find themselves clinging to this banal group, humiliatingly eager to appear respectable in its eyes. Shown up for the moral coward she turns out to be, Lydia explodes with grief and bitter humor.

> "These people—the very prototypes of the bores you took me away from, with the same fenced-in view of life, the same keep-off-the-grass morality, the same little cautious virtues and the same little frightened vices—well, I've clung to them, I've delighted in them, I've done my best to please them. . . . I who used to fancy myself unconventional!"

A mere twelve years later, things had changed drastically, and Wharton's story "Autres Temps" (1911) illustrates the layers of accomodation and rationalization that accompanied the shift. Her heroine, Mrs. Lidcote, is a middle-aged woman whose divorce, some twenty years earlier, had closed New York society to her and sent her into permanent exile in Florence. Now, her daughter Leila is divorcing and remarrying. Mrs. Lidcote boards an ocean liner and rushes back to America, determined to stand by Leila as she braves New York's ostracism. To her bafflement, she discovers that the fashionable, charming Leila and her new husband are as popular as ever. Times have changed: as an old friend remarks, "It would take an arbitration commission a good many sittings to define the boundaries of society nowadays." She is deeply relieved for her daughter. "It's as if an angel has gone about lifting gravestones, and the buried people walked again, and the living didn't shrink from them."

Mrs. Lidcote allows herself a tiny bit of hope. Might this mean that her own sins have now become insignificant? Might she be able to return to New York and resume her old life? But she is quickly disabused of the idea as Leila's elderly dinner guests pointedly cut her, just as they did so many years ago. "It's simply," she muses,

> "that society is much too busy to revise its own judgments. Probably no one in the house with me stopped to consider that my case and Leila's were identical. They only remembered that I'd done something which, at the time I did it, was condemned by society. My case has been passed on and classified."

Chastened, she returns to Italy.

This is Wharton in a serious mode, but she was quick, too, to see the funny side, and in "The Other Two"—one of her most perfect and most delightful stories—we are shown the ridiculous aspect of the new moral code, and even the comforts that might be derived from it by those with a pragmatic bent. Waythorn's wife, Alice, has been married twice before: first, in her youth, to a dowdy provincial businessman named Haskett, then to a rich man about New York, Gus Varick, who was morally rather lax, as Waythorn, who is slightly acquainted with him, is aware. Alice has allowed her new husband to think—more by hints than by anything she actually says—that Haskett was a brute.

Now, for one reason and another, Waythorn finds himself having to meet and deal with both of his predecessors, and he discovers to his surprise that he rather likes them. Alice, he notices, handles the embarrassing fact of their propinquity with singular aplomb: "Even Waythorn could not but admit that she had discovered the solu-

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tion of the newest social problem." As the weeks go by, though, he begins to find Alice's social grace somewhat disturbing.

> Her pliancy was beginning to sicken him. Had she really no will of her own—no theory about her relationship to these men? . . . She was "as easy as an old shoe"—a shoe that too many feet had worn. Her elasticity was the result of tension in too many different directions. . . . Waythorn compared himself to a member of a syndicate.

In the final scene, both Haskett and Varick drop in unexpectedly, and Waythorn finds himself presiding at a very awkward tea table. While they sit trying to make conversation, Alice comes in from shopping.

> She stood drawing off her gloves, propitiatory and graceful, diffusing about her a sense of ease and familiarity in which the situation lost its grotesqueness. "But before talking business," she said brightly, "I'm sure every one wants a cup of tea."
>
> She dropped into her low chair by the tea-table, and the two visitors, as if drawn by her smile, advanced to receive the cups she held out.
>
> She glanced about for Waythorn, and he took the third cup with a laugh.

Here Wharton's humor is indulgent; elsewhere it could be merciless. While she had a certain sympathy for the lax and the easy-going, like the Waythorns, and even for the social parasite—of which Lily Bart is the supreme example—she held the truly rapacious in horror. Undine Spragg in *The Custom of the Country* ("the prototype of the international cocktail bitch," Edmund Wilson called her) is the most fully realized character of this type; the stories contain a few equally extreme versions. The short story form, which does not allow the author to build up a character slowly by a series of actions, demands a quick precision of characterization, and Wharton achieves this masterfully. The essence of the appalling Chrissie Brown in "Her Son" (1932), for example, is made vividly apparent to the reader at her very first entrance upon the scene:

> She was a very pretty woman, with the alert cosmopolitan air of one who had acquired her elegance in places where the very best counterfeits are found. . . . I noticed that her long oval nails were freshly lacquered with the last new shade of coral and that the forefinger was darkly yellowed with nicotine. This familiar colour-scheme struck me at the moment as peculiarly distasteful.

Chrissie is a wonderfully low creation. Even better—in fact, one of Wharton's very best—is the dreadful Mrs. Sam Newell in "The Last Asset" (1904). Mrs. Newell is a greedy, bullying, piratical American woman who has cadged her way through Europe over the course of some twenty years. Now, at long last, her social resources are beginning to run dry, as her compatriot and sometime friend Garnett reflects:

> Mrs. Newell really moved too fast: her position was as perilous as that of an invading army without a base of supplies. She used up everything too quickly—friends, credit, influence, forbearance. . . . He himself, for instance—the most insignificant of her acquisitions—was beginning to feel like a squeezed sponge at the mere thought of her.

Yes, Mrs. Newell has certainly begun her inevitable downhill journey. Then, suddenly, her quiet, overlooked daughter falls in love with an exceedingly eligible French nobleman. His family agrees to accept this déclassée little American bride, but only on the condition that her father, long since discarded by his wife, attend the ceremony.

It turns out that the Newells were never divorced. ("Mercy no!" cries Mrs. Newell. "Divorce is stupid. They don't like it in Europe.") Garnett is dispatched to search out the rejected husband, by now Mrs. Newell's "last asset." Garnett despises himself for dragging the poor man back into the family maelstrom, yet at the end dares to

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hope that he has acted for the best. "After all, neither Mrs. Newell's schemes nor his own share in them could ever unsanctify Hermione's marriage. It was one more testimony to life's indefatigable renewals, to nature's secret of drawing fragrance from corruption."

Several of Wharton's stories are shamelessly lightweight; she took her art seriously, but not, like James, religiously. She worked hard and was, surprisingly for someone who possessed a private fortune, the consummate professional, with a real respect for commercial success and the effort and skill it requires. In one of her stories, "The Recovery" (1901), she gently mocks a painter named Keniston, who was "that favorite figure of imaginative youth, the artist who would rather starve than paint a pot-boiler. It is known to comparatively few," she points out, "that the production of successful pot-boilers is an art in itself, and that such heroic abstentions as Keniston's are not always purely voluntary." Some of Wharton's stories are potboilers pure and simple, but the great majority are not: they are full-bodied, mature pieces of work written by a powerful and sophisticated artist.

Edith Wharton had without doubt a forceful personality: many of her friends, especially Henry James and Percy Lubbock, liked to pretend to cower in terror when she swooped down upon them in her large motorcar, ready to whisk them off to parts unknown. The forcefulness was real: she had needed every ounce of it to escape the constraints of her early life and become the artist that she did. All art, all intellectual effort, was deeply mistrusted by her society; these activities were considered subversive and, when all was said and done, distasteful. "None of my relations," she writes, astoundingly, "ever spoke to me of my books either to praise or blame—they simply ignored them; . . . the subject was avoided as though it were a kind of family disgrace, which might be condoned but could not be forgotten."

Wharton's world seems as unlikely a one for a major artist to emerge from as the poverty and dirt that failed to suppress young artists like Henri Matisse or Charles Dickens. Wharton herself found it something of a puzzle.

> I have often wondered, in looking back at the slow stammering beginning of my literary life, whether or not it is a good thing for the creative artist to grow up in an atmosphere where the arts are simply nonexistent. Violent opposition might be a stimulus—but was it helpful or the reverse to have every aspiration ignored, or looked at askance?

I suspect that in cases like Wharton's—or Matisse's or Dickens's, for that matter—where the will is so vigorous, the intelligence so confident, the urge to create and to express oneself so strong—no amount of opposition can make much of a difference in the end. A lack of encouragement or a lack of means has doubtless destroyed many a talent and formed many a mute inglorious Milton, but when it comes to a force of nature like Wharton, mere class shibboleths cannot hold up.

In exposing those shibboleths and the moral nullity they were created to hide, Wharton proved that her family had had every reason to mistrust her scribblings. In her way she turned out to be as much a traitor to her class as Franklin Roosevelt. Her glory was that she was not afraid to betray it; her tragedy was that she never, in either her life or her work, finally escaped its clutches. Her characters cannot lose sight of the prisonhouse and the abyss, and neither could she.

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The fabrication of Aboriginal history

by Keith Windschuttle

As a preview to the Sydney Olympic Games last September, *The Wall Street Journal* ran a front-page story about the great issue it said was dividing the Australian nation, the treatment of its Aboriginal people. The two journalists who wrote the story opened with an account of an incident near Hobart in Tasmania in 1804 when British soldiers fired on a party of Aboriginal men, women, and children, who were out hunting kangaroos and armed only with clubs. This was "the opening shot in a war that would result in the near-extermination of Tasmanian Aborigines," the journalists wrote. "Some of the 50 or so killed that day were salted down and sent to Sydney as anthropological curiosities."

The fate of the indigenous Tasmanians is today frequently described in the liberal media as an example of British imperial genocide. This is because they were a distinct ethnic group, physically different from mainland Aborigines, and their last full-blooded member died in 1876. To underline the political reach of these events, *The Wall Street Journal* quoted the current federal senator for the Greens Party, Bob Brown: "We have to come to grips with our horrendous past," he said, "and nowhere is it worse than in Tasmania."

The New York Times took a similar approach. The day after the Sydney Games began it published an editorial entitled "The Other Australia," which admonished the country for its treatment of its Aboriginal people and recounted the horrors of its history. The editorial, which was reprinted around the world in the *International Herald Tribune*, said:

> The Aboriginal experience is depressingly similar to that of Native Americans in the United States. European settlers viciously drove the Aborigines from their land, massacring thousands with impunity.

At the same time, another article on this subject was syndicated to English-language newspapers around the world. This was written by Ben Kiernan, the A. Whitney Griswold Professor of History and Director of the Genocide Studies Program at Yale University. (My copy of his article came from the *Bangkok Post*.) Kiernan is an expatriate Australian, best known for his books on the Pol Pot regime in Cambodia. Despite his academic credentials, Kiernan made no pretense to treat his topic dispassionately. Entitled "Australia's Aboriginal Genocides," his story was replete with terminology such as "ethnic cleansing" and "transit camps" designed to draw comparisons with the practices of Nazi Germany and contemporary Yugoslavia.

Kiernan wrote of British colonists in the nineteenth century mounting "punitive expeditions" and committing "hundreds of massacres." In the Gippsland district of Victoria, for instance, "a series of horrendous massacres" reduced the Aboriginal popula-

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tion from 2000 to 126, he said. In Central Australia, he claimed, 40 percent of the indigenous population had been shot dead. In northern Queensland, the Aborigines "were hunted like wild beasts, having lived for years in a state of absolute terror of white predators." He also recorded the same 1804 incident at Hobart described in *The Wall Street Journal*, putting the total killed at forty. Among a long list of atrocities since the 1790s, Kiernan noted that as late as 1926 whites shot and burned to death 100 Aborigines at Forrest River in Western Australia. "The two police officers involved were acquitted and promoted." All told, Kiernan wrote, 20,000 Aborigines were killed resisting the British occupation of Australia between 1788 and 1901.

The desire by Australian authors to portray the history of race relations in their country in the blackest terms possible reached its nadir in a book by the journalist Phillip Knightley, *Australia: A Biography of a Nation*, published in London last year. Knightley, another expatriate who was a member of the famous team of investigative journalists on the London *Sunday Times* in the 1960s, devoted a chapter of his book to "Black Australia." He agreed that the story amounted to "genocide," and he drew what he called "striking parallels" between the Holocaust and the fate of the Aborigines.

> Defeated in the Aboriginal Wars of the nineteenth century, they had become a forgotten race, reviled, murdered, harassed, discriminated against, and subject to cruel and unusual punishments. It remains one of the mysteries of history that Australia was able to get away with a racist policy that included segregation and dispossession and bordered on slavery and genocide, practices unknown in the civilized world in the first half of the twentieth century until Nazi Germany turned on the Jews in the 1930s.

Instead of Kiernan's death toll of 20,000, Knightley claimed the number of Aborigines killed in the "wars and massacres" of the past two centuries was much higher. "Experts I have consulted say that 50,000 would not be an exaggeration. It could be as high as 100,000." This is from a total pre-colonial indigenous population of about 300,000. Yet until recently, Knightley noted, very few outsiders were aware of the scale of the carnage. "It is amazing that Australians managed to keep from the rest of the world the fact that they were massacring the Aboriginals."

Almost without dissent, the Australian liberal intelligentsia has taken this story to heart. *The Wall Street Journal* is correct in saying that it is now the most divisive issue in the nation. On the one side stand the media, the arts community, the Labor Party parliamentary opposition, almost all academics, and a large proportion of the judiciary who accept this account of Australia's past. On the other side is the conservative prime minister, John Howard, and many of his constituents and supporters who argue that, even if true, the events happened so long ago that current generations cannot be held responsible for them. Howard's opponents, however, blame all the current problems faced by outback Aboriginal communities—chronic alcoholism, petrol sniffing, heroin addiction, domestic violence, unemployment, and appalling health and education standards—on their dispossession from tribal lands and the subsequent loss of their traditional hunter-gatherer culture. Howard has faced enormous public pressure to issue a formal apology over the issue and thus open the way to large-scale claims for compensation, but so far he has refused.

In the 1990s, the High Court of Australia made two decisions that meant large tracts of the continent would be turned into "native title," a new form of property that could be held only by people of indigenous descent. One of the judges who made these decisions, Sir William Deane, the recently retired Governor-General of Australia, based much of his argument on the writings of Australian historians who had shown the nation, he said, that it had inherited "a legacy of unutterable shame."

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Despite the certainty with which such pronouncements have been made, and despite the political weight they carry, the body of historical work from which they derive is actually very small. The history of relations between Aborigines and British colonists only began to be taken seriously at an academic level in the 1970s. Claims about large-scale massacres and of a death toll in the tens of thousands date from the 1980s and, in fact, derive largely from the work of one historian, Henry Reynolds, and his book *The Other Side of the Frontier* (1981). Reynolds and his colleagues have generated a number of academic followers and have established an intellectual framework within which most research on the subject has since been done.

Like several of his supporters who now hold prominent chairs of history at Australian universities, Reynolds was a member of the generation of Sixties radicals. He remains a political activist today and recently wrote *Aboriginal Sovereignty*, a book that has inspired the leading black radicals in the Aboriginal movement. The book argues for a separate Aboriginal state governed by Aboriginal laws where traditional Aboriginal culture can flourish. It identifies with the international "first peoples" political movement that wants independence from imperial domination for all indigenous cultures and which is currently working through the United Nations to achieve that end. In Australia, the current overt demand is for a treaty with the rest of the country. For public consumption in the media, the activists justify a treaty simply on the grounds of "rectifying past injustices." In writings addressed to their own supporters, however, they see a treaty establishing the grounds for a separate state and government.

In other words, what we have here is a version of Australian history designed to serve highly politicized ends. To date, it has largely been accepted without demur, except by a handful of older historians such as Geoffrey Blainey, who has labelled it "black armband history." And yet, in terms of acceptable scholarship, it has very little to recommend it. When it is closely examined, much of the evidence for the claims about massacres, terrorism, and genocide turns out to be highly suspect. Most of it is very poorly founded, other parts are seriously mistaken, and a good deal of it is outright fabrication.

Let me give an idea of the nature of the debate with two specific examples. The first is the 1804 incident at Hobart. The British officers who were there at the time said a settler and his wife had been surrounded in their hut and threatened by more than 200 Aborigines armed with spears. Soldiers from a nearby camp came to the rescue and shot, at most, three people. One native man was killed on the spot, another's body was found in a nearby valley, and a third was led away by his companions bleeding from wounds. These officers had no ostensible reason to lie in their reports or to downplay the conflict. They were only doing their duty. At a government inquiry in 1830, however, a former convict testified that in 1804 he thought "forty to fifty" blacks had been killed, even though he acknowledged he had not been at the scene at the time.

Despite this claim being no more than a rumour twenty-six years after the event, it has allowed those historians who want to beat up this issue to say that witnesses have claimed "up to fifty" Aborigines were killed in this incident. Hence, when translated into general works of history and into the press, a defensive action with three adult male casualties has become a massacre of fifty innocent men, women, and children. *The Wall Street Journal*'s claim that the bodies were "salted down" and sent to Sydney for anthropological investigation is another rumor first made in 1830 that had no contemporary corroboration.

The event at Forrest River in 1926, described by Kiernan as one of the "hundreds of massacres" that took place in the twentieth century, has more surface plausibility. The Western Australian government appointed a royal commissioner to look into the allegations. The commissioner found

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that two policemen, while on the hunt for an Aboriginal who had murdered a pastoralist, had themselves shot eleven natives in their custody and burnt their remains beyond recognition. Until recently, historians had no good reason to doubt his findings. The figure of 100 dead cited by Kiernan is in a different position. It comes from Aboriginal oral history collected in the 1970s and has no more status than local mythology.

In 1999, however, the Perth journalist Rod Moran published a detailed analysis of the evidence and conclusions of the Forrest River Royal Commission. In his book *Massacre Myth*, Moran proves beyond reasonable doubt that no such killings ever took place. There were no eyewitnesses, no forensic evidence of human beings killed, nor any ballistic evidence. He produces a medical officer's analysis made at the time, and largely ignored by later commentators, that charred bones found at some camp sites were not of human origin or were of indeterminate origin. They were probably the remains of animals cooked over camp fires. The most incriminating evidence of a massacre had been a list of twenty-nine Aborigines from the local mission who had gone missing, presumed killed, at the time of the police patrol. Moran shows this list, compiled by the head of the mission, is fraudulent. He examined the mission's surviving documents and found several of the Aborigines on the list were recorded on the attendance roll alive and well two and three years later. Some of them were recorded as having died well before the police patrol took place. Others had not been seen at the mission for up to two years before the events concerned. Moran persuasively argues that the mission head fabricated not only this list but also other evidence upon which the commission had relied.

Research of my own has since found that this behavior was characteristic of a number of well-known missionaries in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These missionaries took any rumor about violence towards Aborigines, no matter how unreliable or vague, and propagated it without checking its accuracy. Why would they do such a thing? They wanted to show the need for their own institutions. By portraying colonial society as awash with violence towards the blacks, they justified their policy of separating Aborigines from white society. They wanted their missions to appear as havens in a heartless world. This fulfilled the Protestant evangelical theology on which their actions were based: the everyday, material world was full of evil and corruption and the only road to salvation for Aborigines lay in a closed religious community. Here they could be kept apart from the modern world and separated from white society. It also meant the missionaries would keep their funding and their jobs. They hoped to be seen by their peers in the colony and their sponsors in London as the saviors of the Aborigines.

The rumours and myths they disseminated have colored the whole record of Aboriginal-European relations in Australia's early colonial history. They have also influenced policy ever since. Those who claim to be the friends of Aborigines have long supported separatism—from the missions and government reserves of the nineteenth century down to the proposals for a treaty and separate state today.

Recent academic historians have used the claims of missionaries to construct a lurid series of massacre stories, adding an extra dimension of their own. Until 1981 no historian had been confident enough to estimate the total number of Aborigines killed on the frontiers of the British occupation. No systematic count of bodies had ever been made, and the handful of researchers then in the field knew many reports of killings were unreliable. The most reputable historian in the field, Charles Rowley, had said in 1970 that, compared to the impact on indigenous peoples of other colonizing powers, the Australian story amounted to "comparatively small-scale homicide." All this changed with the publication of Henry Reynolds's *The Other Side of the Frontier*. He estimated that settlers killed at least 20,000

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Aborigines between 1788 and 1901. Relative to the size of their population, this figure suggested that between 5 and 20 percent of all Aborigines in the colonial period died violently by white hands. This was, Reynolds said, a shocking indictment.

> Twenty thousand blacks were killed before federation. Their burial mound stands out as a landmark of awesome size on the peaceful plains of colonial history. If the bodies had been white our histories would be heavy with their story, a forest of monuments would celebrate their "sacrifice." In parts of the continent the Aboriginal death toll overshadows even that of the overseas wars of the twentieth century.

This figure is nowhere near as great as the indigenous death toll from disease in the early nineteenth century, but it is still a disturbing total. It now entered the established record and become part of the received wisdom of Australian historiography. It is the current consensus among Australian historians. (The figure of 50,000–100,000 cited by Phillip Knightley is pure invention. The only "authority" to suggest a total this high is a book of popular history written by Bruce Elder, a journalist whose normal specialty is rock 'n' roll music. It is heavily ironic that Knightley, the author of a very good book on war reporting and propaganda, *The First Casualty*, has himself succumbed to the kind of atrocity stories he has criticized others for accepting.)

Very few historians have ever questioned the veracity of Reynolds's figure of 20,000 dead or traced its sources to their origins. It derived from a compilation he made of estimates by historians of various regions. One of these regions is Queensland where Reynolds's source is his own research. In *The Other Side of the Frontier*, he said that he had spent several years going through official records and press reports and had found that Queensland was by far the bloodiest area for Aboriginal-white conflict. As the Queensland pastoral frontier expanded from 1850 to 1900, some 10,000 Aborigines were killed by whites. In his book, Reynolds said he had published the actual details of this research in 1978 in a small university monograph entitled *Race Relations in North Queensland*. Even though 10,000 in Queensland was a remarkably high figure—the other regional studies he cited produced a combined death toll for the rest of the continent of less than 3000—no scholar doubted Reynolds's claims nor investigated his methodology. For the next twenty years, Australian historians were happy to cite him as the authority.

In July and August 2000, I began a project to investigate the evidence behind Aboriginal killings. One of the first works I looked up was Reynolds's 1978 monograph, *Race Relations in North Queensland*, a typescript volume held by only a few libraries. To my surprise, I found it is not about Aboriginal deaths at all. It is a tally of the number of *whites* killed by Aborigines. Nowhere does it mention 10,000 Aboriginal dead. It produces evidence that Aborigines may have killed between 800 and 850 Europeans from 1850 to 1900. The only mention it makes of Aboriginal deaths is in one sole footnote where the author says that while it is impossible to do anything but guess at the number of natives killed, their death rate "may have been" ten times more than that of the Europeans. In other words, as well as being a false citation of evidence, this document meant the overall historical consensus about Aboriginal killings had a gaping hole in its empirical foundation.

I presented this finding to a conference in Sydney last September, arguing that it amounted to a major piece of academic deception. I also presented some of the evidence now emerging about the exaggeration and invention involved in some of the best-known events, such as the Forrest River "massacre." Because Reynolds has a high media profile (he has had a television series called *Frontier* made from his books, and the liberal daily, *The Sydney Morning Herald,* recently nominated him as one of

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the 100 greatest living Australians), my paper attracted considerable media attention. Very little of it, however, was sympathetic to my findings. Most commentary was outraged that I had dared to question the orthodox position. Four academic historians and the political scientist, Robert Manne—once the editor of the leading Australian conservative intellectual magazine, *Quadrant*, but now a member of the Left establishment—compared me in the press to the Holocaust denier David Irving.

In a mainly *ad hominem* reply, Henry Reynolds himself conceded that his figure of 20,000 was only a guess. He also conceded my critique that, on the available evidence, most of the killings of Aborigines that had occurred comprised individually small numbers. Almost all homicides were in ones and twos and the phenomenon of mass killing was rare and isolated. He completely ignored, however, the charge of academic deception and stood by his original tally as an "educated and conservative" guess. He had done "a mountain of research" and had published his reading in a twenty-five-page bibliography. Because his work rested on such a great body of reading, he said people should trust his judgment.

While I had demonstrated that there was very little reliable evidence for most of the claims about the killing of Aborigines, defenders of the orthodoxy replied that this is just what you would expect in a frontier war situation. Pastoralists displaced both Aborigines and the game they depended upon. Faced with the loss of their land and starvation, the Aborigines understandably responded with violence. The orthodox view claimed that the frontier was a place where whites could kill blacks with impunity. No other settlers on the frontier would have reported them and the police either turned a blind eye or were complicit in massacres themselves. Hence widespread killings would have occurred without leaving any trace in the historical evidence.

This is, of course, a circular argument. To explain why there would be no evidence of widespread killings, you claim there was a frontier war situation, which, under this definition, is a place where there were widespread killings but where no evidence of them remained.

The most revealing comment was made by Dr. Bain Attwood of Monash University who wrote: "Most of the historical sources that might have enabled us to enumerate the number of Aboriginal people killed on the frontier have, for various reasons, either never existed or have since been lost or destroyed." Attwood went on to claim that "very little historical interpretation is verifiable in any strict sense," and that historians arrive at the truth on the basis of a "scholarly consensus." Now, the notion of a scholarly consensus might be acceptable if there was sufficient evidence to support it. However, if the evidence "never existed" or can no longer be found, then the consensus can owe nothing to scholarship. It is no more than a shared ideological position. To imagine that one can arrive at conclusions without evidence, but simply on the basis of an agreement between those currently in the field, is to abandon historical methodology in favor of politics—he who has the numbers determines the truth. Unfortunately, this postmodernist assumption now dominates the teaching of history at our universities.

My critique of the current orthodoxy was published in a three-part series of articles in *Quadrant* late last year. I am now expanding this work into a book that makes three principal arguments. First, rather than genocide and frontier warfare, British colonization of Australia brought civilized society and the rule of law. Whites could not kill blacks with impunity. In fact, as the British government regularly reminded all its colonial governors, Aborigines were subjects of His Majesty and entitled to the protection of his laws. The penalty for the unlawful killing of an Aborigine was death, the same as for killing a white man. This was enshrined in one celebrated incident, the Myall Creek Massacre of 1838, where a group of convict and ex-convict stockmen killed twenty-eight Aboriginal

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men, women, and children encamped on a pastoral station. The overseer found the bodies and was appalled. He reported the incident and identified those responsible, who were subsequently tried for murder. Eleven were found guilty and seven were executed for the crime. Modern historians try to argue this event away by saying it was the exception rather than the rule. The fact remains, however, that it was a highly publicized case of the rule of law being upheld and justice being done in a way that could not fail to impress even the most crudely racist member of the then penal colony. There is a considerable body of other evidence from the pastoral frontier that shows the colonial police did their duty and the authorities scrutinized their activities closely.

Second, rather than evidence of Aboriginal killings "never existing" or being lost or destroyed, the documentary record is actually quite comprehensive. I am currently working on the archives of Tasmania, a very small society where, except for a gap of two years, there are good records of the activities of the entire British population from 1803 to 1831. The leading orthodox historian of Aboriginal-European relations in Tasmania, Professor Lyndall Ryan, claims that 700 natives were shot dead in this period. She acknowledges that half this figure is her own extrapolation based on guesswork but she nonetheless claims the archival record directly confirms a body count of 362 natives who died by gunshot. After surveying the secondary sources and checking all their citations of reports of killings in the original documents, however, I have found that a reliable figure of British killings of Aborigines in Tasmania is less than one-hundred. This is about half the number of colonists who died at native hands and is a figure that makes the notion of "frontier warfare" look absurd.

Third, the idea that Aborigines were patriots engaged in a brave but futile defense of their territory against the firepower of British imperialism is a piece of ideology derived from the anti-colonialist movement of the 1950s and 1960s. It has little to do with the mentality of tribal hunter-gatherers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century when colonization originally took place. Rather than nationalist hostility, the Aboriginal response to the arrival of the British was quite different. In some places, Aborigines were fascinated by, and strongly drawn towards, white society. Some became quickly dependent upon white food supplies and addicted to British products such as flour, sugar, tea, tobacco, and rum. In other places, personal quarrels between whites and natives, especially over women and the theft of food, led to violence. Under the Aboriginal notion of "payback" justice, an offense against a native could be revenged by a violent assault on any white man. The great majority of killings of both whites and blacks took place under these conditions. While they involved a genuine clash between the two different cultures' notions of justice and law, rarely did they amount to "frontier warfare," and certainly not the kind of anti-colonial guerrilla warfare familiar to most historians who came of age in the 1960s. As for the Aborigines being driven into conflict by starvation after native game was eliminated, many frontier pastoralists reported that, after they had removed the timber to expand their pastures, in most places they suffered "a plague" of kangaroos, whose populations exploded to take advantage of the greatly increased supply of grass.

It is true that the Aboriginal population declined dramatically after British colonization but this was almost entirely due to disease: smallpox on the north and east coasts (contracted from fishermen visiting from present-day Indonesia), and influenza and pneumonia in the rest of the continent and on Tasmania. The Aboriginal birth rate also plummeted, primarily due to the spread of venereal disease. In Tasmania and most of the south and east of the continent, the last full-blooded Aborigines died in the nineteenth century.

The twentieth century, however, saw people of Aboriginal descent revive their

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numbers to their current total of 386,000. The great majority of these people today show little inclination to fulfil the romantic agenda set for them by recent historians and political activists. Rather than remain in outback communities, 73 percent of them today have moved to the cities and large regional centers. In the suburbs of Sydney alone, there are more people who identify themselves as Aboriginal than in the entire Western third of the continent, outside of Perth. Some 71 percent of Aborigines profess Christianity and a mere 2.06 percent adhere to traditional tribal religion. Two-thirds of the adults are married to or cohabiting with a nonindigenous spouse. In the cities, their employment, education levels, and health are much better than in the outback communities where the activists want them to live. In other words, at a time when Australian politics and the judiciary are making extensive land grants in the outback, and when academics, artists, and the news media are calling for the revival of traditional culture on tribal land, the great majority of Aboriginal people themselves are voting with their feet and assimilating into white society.

Why then has the history of Aboriginal-European relations become such a burning issue? It is more than a matter of the fabrication of evidence by a group of radical historians. A proper explanation of the phenomenon needs to tell us not only why so many prominent people have been drawn into the issue, but also why the historians themselves seized upon it in the first place.

As I have indicated, part of the explanation derives from the culture of the Sixties. At the time, Australian radicals took their political ideas largely from the United States. In race relations, they adopted the notion of "Black Power," which claimed that policies for the assimilation or the integration of non-white people into white society were racist. The Marxist guru of the 1960s Herbert Marcuse and his followers argued that just as capitalism co-opted the working class into accepting capitalist ideology, so whites wanted to co-opt blacks into a form of integration that would betray black interests and suppress black culture. These ideas produced similar sentiments among Aboriginal activists in this country.

Black power also coincided with the decolonization of Asia and Africa. The emergent nationalist movements in these regions were anti-imperialist and anti-European. Many activists in Aboriginal politics came to identify British imperialism and racism as the cause of all their problems. Many historians in Australia swallowed this political agenda whole. They made their own contribution to it by manufacturing stories about the widespread killing of Aborigines in our past in order to shore up its separatist assumptions.

There is more to the issue, however, than the politics of the Sixties. It goes much deeper into Western culture. Ever since Christopher Columbus discovered the New World, there has been a heated debate within Western society over its relations with the indigenous peoples who subsequently came within its realm. The debate has been remarkably consistent over the whole of this five-hundred-year period in that, rather than focusing primarily on the indigenes, it has been far more concerned to use their presence to mount a critique of European society itself. European intellectuals have used the notion of primitive peoples living in harmony with a beneficent nature as a contrast to the complexity and restrictions of their own civilization. When Montaigne wrote his essay "On Cannibals" in 1580, he knew very little about the cannibals of the New World themselves, but he was able to imagine that they lived in a "state of purity" that contrasted sharply with all the institutions that were the bane of civilized man's existence.

> This is a nation, I should say to Plato, in which there is no sort of traffic, no knowledge of letters, no science of numbers, no name for a magistrate or for political superiority, no custom of servitude, no riches or poverty, no contracts, no successions, no partitions, no

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> occupations but leisure ones, no care for any but common kinship, no clothes, no agriculture, no metal, no use of wine or wheat. The very words that signify lying, treachery, dissimulation, avarice, envy, belittling, pardon—unheard of.

In the seventeenth century, the English poet John Dryden coined the term "noble savage" to refer to such "guiltless men." In the eighteenth century, the French radical Jean-Jacques Rousseau portrayed "the celestial and majestic simplicity of man before corruption by society."

In his monumental survey of Western culture over the past five centuries *From Dawn to Decadence*, Jacques Barzun records that a yearning for what he calls "primitivism" has been a powerful force over the whole of this time. Primitivism is one of the key impulses that inspired those who were drawn to Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation. Barzun notes that this impulse is based on the perception that complex social systems are both oppressive and corrupt. Hence it repeatedly creates a demand for "the pure," not only in religion and social organization, but across the whole of the culture: "pure love, pure thought, pure form in art." It is the principal impulse behind the notion of the "noble savage." Primitivism, Barzun argues, is closely related to the demand for emancipation. Together, the rejection of complex, rule-based society and the yearning for an earlier, simpler, more natural state of humanity, have regularly produced calls for the overthrow of existing social structures, in both the church and the polity.

Another illuminating recent analysis of this issue is by the Californian classicist Bruce Thornton. In *Plagues of the Mind* (ISI books, 1999) Thornton provides a critique of the prevailing radical cult of romanticism. He demonstrates the connection between the concept of the noble savage and a number of contemporary radical impulses, including the "deep green" environmentalist movement, American Indian politics, and recent directions in "New Age" feminism. The noble savage is manifest not only in recent Hollywood products such as *Dances with Wolves* and *Pocahontas*, but has also been a staple of American political radicalism. Thornton argues that, since Rousseau, the concept has nourished those revolutionary political movements—from the Jacobins to the Khmer Rouge—who have wanted to purge society of its failings and recreate the imagined purity of a community of perfect beings. He observes that variations on the theme go as far back as the poet Hesiod in 700 B.C. It represents a longing for a return to a pre-civilized existence and to escape from a rule-based social system. As such, it is a protest by the civilized against civilization itself. It is a desire that derives from a fundamental misinterpretation of the object of its dissent. Thornton writes:

> By denigrating Western civilization—the imperfect but still best hope for controlling humanity's penchant for evil and for providing the greatest freedom for the greatest number of people—the myth of the noble savage nurtures the false hope that human perfection and freedom are possible *without* civilization.

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Louis Sullivan after functionalism

by Michael J. Lewis

[W]hat is the chief characteristic of the tall office building? And at once we answer, it is lofty. . . . It must be every inch a proud and soaring thing, rising in sheer exultation that from bottom to top it is a unit without a single dissenting line.
—Louis Sullivan

Ah, that supreme, erotic, high adventure of the mind that was his ornament.
—Frank Lloyd Wright

Was ever a genre of art scorned as much as was architectural ornament during the heyday of modernism? Decorative carving, panels, and friezes became abominations: excrescences lathered over otherwise honest brick boxes, and all in the service of corrupt social display. To purge them was high moral duty. In his 1908 essay "Ornament and Crime," Adolf Loos famously compared the ornament of a building to the tattoos of a criminal, thereby giving a lofty anthropological basis to what might otherwise be regarded as a matter of personal taste.

The goal, of course, was reform. A building should not derive meaning and character from the historical motifs that cluttered its skin, but from the direct, logical expression of its purpose and materials. This was the edict of functionalism, that—as Louis Sullivan put it—"form follows function." Sullivan's Wainwright Building in St. Louis embodied this doctrine, winning him the status of a prophet: the inventor of the skyscraper, the uncompromising sage who chose principled poverty over worldly success, and the oracle who passed on the functionalist gospel to his disciple Frank Lloyd Wright, who carried it in turn to the world. So went the myth. That this same Sullivan draped his buildings in the most voluptuous and sybaritic ornament America had ever seen was a matter of some embarrassment to the mythmakers.

Hugh Morrison, author of *Louis Sullivan: Prophet of Modern Architecture* (1935), disavowed the "overwrought lyricism of his ornament." Sigfried Giedion's *Space, Time, and Architecture* (1941) took the next step, cropping a photograph of the Carson Pirie Scott store so as to omit both cornice and ground level, showing only the crisp skeletal cage of its middle stories. Many a reader, persuaded that Sullivan was a Bauhaus follower *avant la lettre*, was brought up short in the course of a visit to Chicago by the sight of the writhing ornament of its entrance—a Cartesian grid into which Medusa had slithered.

Not until 1956, the centenary of Sullivan's birth, was his ornament treated sympathetically. John Szarkowski, then beginning a career that would lead to the directorship of the Department of Photography at the Museum of Modern Art, published *The Idea of Louis Sullivan*, an exquisite portfolio of photographs of Sullivan's work. Placing the camera squarely on the sidewalk, Szarkowski not only captured the luxuriant plasticity

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of the ornament, but also the vibrant urban life that pulsed around it. He showed that Sullivan's architecture and ornament were reciprocal aspects of the same creative impulse—the ornament no less integral to the idea of the building than the foundations that sustained it. It was a revelation, and it did not go unpunished. Philip Johnson, acting as the arbiter of modernist orthodoxy, published a damning review in *Art News* that branded Sullivan's ornament as a "strange profusion" and "totally inexplicable." Sullivan's reputation was at its nadir.

Szarkowski's book nonetheless set in motion the rehabilitation of Sullivan as a major figure in American cultural history. It has now been handsomely reissued,[1] with a charming new introduction by the author that shows how it came to be (including some surprising anecdotes about his personal encounters with Wright and Walker Evans during the course of his work). Two other significant studies of Sullivan have appeared, devoting much space to the vexing matter of his ornament. If Sullivan's ornament was once a dirty secret, it now seems to be our principal reason for remembering him. But have we exchanged one partial view for another?

Louis Henry Sullivan was born in Boston in 1856, the son of an ambitious Irish dancing master and his Swiss Mennonite wife. Virtually all we know of his early life derives from his *Autobiography of an Idea* (1924), a minor literary classic. Told in a rather narcissistic third person ("Louis's eyes were riveted in fascination") and frequently slipping into Whitmanesque free verse, it concentrates on the childhood and youth. The buildings on which Sullivan's reputation rests are mentioned perfunctorily or not at all. In their place is a series of vivid personal encounters—remembered a half century after the fact with quivering urgency.

Sullivan had little respect for his ambitious father ("a lackey, a flunkey, a social parasite"), although he gives little indication why this should be so. Sullivan does confess to idolizing the "magnificent, man-god heroes" of dime novels. He sought these characteristics in a series of surrogate fathers: Henri List, his maternal grandfather; Moses Woolson, his beloved high school teacher; Frank Furness, his first architectural employer; and Christian-Victor Clopet, his flamboyant French mathematics instructor. While he fawned over them shamelessly in his autobiography, it is hard to escape the impression that he had a weakness for intellectual bullies. In 1887 he wrote an embarrassing mash letter to Walt Whitman ("I too 'have sweated through fogs with linguists and contenders' . . . reaching for the basis of a virile and indigenous art"). It is easy to see how Wright, Sullivan's assistant from 1888 to 1893, cultivated his own imperious manner in this hothouse of devout power worship.

Sullivan's formal architectural education was spotty: one year at M.I.T. in 1872–73 and another at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris in 1874–75, both of which failed to hold his interest. Afterwards he settled in Chicago, where he remained for the rest of his life. Office training and independent reading filled in the gaps of his abbreviated education. This lack of sustained and systematic study marked his career. Well into his partnership with Dankmar Adler, he was hardly an architect at all, rather a clever draftsman with a gift for ornament. Academic success would have required a regimentation of mind that was alien to Sullivan's character.

The critical point of his education seems to have been his six-month apprenticeship in the office of the Philadelphia architect Frank Furness. He was the son of the Unitarian minister William Henry Furness, an outspoken abolitionist in pro-slavery Philadelphia and a childhood friend of Emerson. Furness inherited the intellectual freedom of transcendentalism and a cordial dislike of convention, in architecture and elsewhere. Furness was also a ruffian; a profane Civil War cavalry hero who liked to discharge his revolver at a moose's head hung in his office. This wildness percolated in his mus-

1 *The Idea of Louis Sullivan*, by John Szarkowski; Bulfinch Press, 162 pages, $60.

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cular buildings, in which distorted and compacted Gothic forms suggested immense physical force held in precarious check. Sullivan noted admiringly how Furness "drew and swore at the same time."

Sullivan soon learned to imitate Furness's eccentric architectural ornament. This was conventional in subject matter—stylized flora in the vein of Owen Jones in England or Ruprich-Robert in France—but not in treatment, which had a peculiar alert angularity. Here was the source of Sullivan's own ornamental style, which emerged over the course of the next decade as he gradually softened Furness's linearity and added a new sumptuousness. This development can be traced year by year in Robert Twombly and Narciso G. Menocal's *Louis Sullivan: The Poetry of Architecture*, which reproduces for the first time all 273 surviving Sullivan drawings.[2] We can see how he learned to place the supple stalks of Furness's plants against a background of luxuriant foliage, bursting into bloom, so that one or more axes of growth were juxtaposed with a vignette of germination—a delirious conflation of images of birth, growth and bursting ripeness. In his mature examples these fluent lines and unfolding petals achieve a kind of rapturous ecstasy, coming closer to the European Art Nouveau than anything else in American art.

In the boom years of post-fire Chicago, Sullivan drifted from office to office as a decorative draftsman. In 1881 he joined the office of Dankmar Adler, a German-born Jew whose father was a rabbi. Adler had a good practice in business blocks and theaters but, as his talents lay in engineering and acoustics, he soon delegated aesthetic matters to Sullivan. A bemused Chicago reporter described Sullivan at this time as a pleasant young man but "somewhat troubled by large ideas tending to metaphysics." In 1883 Adler and Sullivan formed a partnership, neatly dividing the work between them. The senior partner accomplished the planning and the engineering, delivering as it were the bare hulk, while Sullivan composed and embellished all the visible surfaces, within and without. Their work was in the characteristic Chicago vernacular that hard-nosed developers had devised: large squarish office blocks, with large windows and slender piers. These were profit-maximizing machines that followed a few standard floor plans from which no deviations would be tolerated or any grace note that might reduce income-producing space or natural light. Upon their formulaic crates Sullivan had little creative scope beyond the articulation of the piers and the cornice. Still, he gave them something of Furness's nervous energy, banding the piers in contrasting colors and incising them with buoyant flowers, reprising the vertical theme of the compositions.

For all his precocity, Sullivan was a late bloomer. His office blocks were the work of a draftsman, not an architect, their cadenzas of cleverness worked out on the drafting table and, like his floral ornament, conceived in two dimensions. His mature style did not begin to emerge until 1887 with the design of the Auditorium Building, the firm's first masterpiece. Once again, the technical feats were Adler's, including the exceptional acoustics and the ingenious use of iron weights to pre-load the tower during construction to prevent subsequent settling. The exterior was Sullivan's—though he derived its massive romanesque character from H. H. Richardson's Marshall Field Store in Chicago, with its colossal masses assembled in majestic repose—and the Auditorium has a markedly sculptural quality, Sullivan's first truly architectonic work. Unlike its agitated predecessors, it had a unity of expression that could be grasped at a glance, suggesting a single mighty impetus rather than the sum of many improvisations.

2 *Louis Sullivan: The Poetry of Architecture*, by Robert Twombly and Narciso G. Menocal; W. W. Norton, 439 pages, $75. This book also includes a reconstruction of the final version of Sullivan's "Essay on Inspiration," known only from a French translation of the lost manuscript.

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Whether Sullivan is indeed the father of the skyscraper depends on the paternity test. The technical challenge of tall steel frame construction had already been mastered by other Chicago architects: William LeBaron Jenney had pioneered curtain-wall construction in his Home Life Building, whose façade is a slender skin of masonry applied to a steel cage. The aesthetic challenge had also been met. The Monadnock Building, by the firm of Burnham & Root, is a simple tapered shaft that rises from base to flaring cornice without intermediate divisions or adornment. But this was constructed in conventional masonry, and was of almost Egyptian thickness at the base. Sullivan's accomplishment was to wed these technical and aesthetic innovations in a satisfying whole.

This he did in the Wainwright Building (1890–91), a ten-story office building in St. Louis, "a sudden and volcanic design (made literally in three minutes)." For Sullivan the cardinal fact of a tall building was height —that it was "a proud and soaring thing" —and he expressed this in a simple tripartite composition of base, shaft, and crown. The ground story boasts large display windows above which rose a skeleton of lithe brick piers that burst into bloom at the cornice line, filling the attic zone with thick floral ornament. Between the piers themselves, the horizontal panels (or spandrels) are recessed in order to accentuate the vertical members; these too are faced with terra cotta panels teeming with foliage. In them a welter of upright stalks once again puns on the vertical theme of the building. Despite the intent to describe structure forthrightly, the building is not literally "truthful." Only every other pier actually conceals a steel girder, while the alternating piers simply complete the articulation. (This can be detected at the ground story, where the non-structural piers come to rest above display windows, which a structural pier could not do.)

This bit of visual legerdemain was noted and criticized by Montgomery Schuyler, America's foremost architectural critic, during the course of a lengthy review of the work of Adler and Sullivan in the *Architectural Record* in 1896. It was the most intelligent and pointed analysis the firm ever received, but it seems to have wounded Sullivan's vanity. A month later, in considerable heat, he published "The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered," his principal statement of the doctrine of functionalism. This doctrine had been fermenting for some time. During his year in Paris, his tutor Clopet had made the remarkable statement that his mathematical demonstrations were "so broad so as to admit of *no exception*." The idea startled Sullivan, who was intrigued by the idea that it might be possible to find a definition of architecture just as comprehensive and universally valid. To do this he found a unifying principle—as did so many architectural thinkers before him—in the world of nature.

Sullivan's view of nature was no pastoral paradise watched over by a benign and omnipotent god. Instead it was nature in the mixed terms of Darwin and Emerson, materialist in its action but transcendental in its meaning. Darwin taught him how to view animals and plants as mechanical contrivances, their forms precisely adapted to perform certain physical actions. Emerson showed how this correspondence between shape and essential being was in itself something akin to a divine principle, applying equally to an animal or to a skyscraper.

> It is the pervading law of all things organic, and inorganic, of all things physical and metaphysical, of all things human and all things superhuman, of all true manifestations of the head, of the heart, of the soul, that the life is recognizable in its expression, that form ever follows function. This is the law.

So Sullivan wrote. Against such a sweeping universal truth, Schuyler's niggling over "false piers" seemed tepid tea indeed.

Sullivan's further claim that "Where function does not change form does not change" was a hard saying, for it contradicted the evidence of his buildings. These may not have varied in function but in form they

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certainly did. Alternately skeletal or planar, tower-like or cubic, massive or crystalline, they showed a limitless variety quite at odds with Sullivan's idea of a definitive "true normal type" for the skyscraper. The discrepancy preoccupies Twombly and Menocal, whose co-authored book emerged out of a friendly debate over this exact question. Unable to come to a mutually satisfactory answer, they agreed to publish their essays in tandem, serving as an accompaniment to the catalogue of drawings. The result is necessarily repetitive, the same buildings often being analyzed twice, but because their two approaches are so completely different, it generally works.

Twombly concentrates on Sullivan's social and political thought, which played an increasingly large part in his writings after the turn of the century. For Twombly, the design, ornament, and endless compositional variety of Sullivan's skyscrapers can be explained by his program of "democratic renewal" and his attempt to democratize the essentially "neofeudal" character of the skyscraper. There is some merit to the argument but the link is tenuous at times, especially in the discussion of Sullivan's houses and his Auditorium Building. The link seems even less convincing in light of Twombly's own earlier biography, *Louis Sullivan: His Life and Work* (1986). There he provocatively suggested that Sullivan was a repressed homosexual, which caused him considerable personal anguish and which must be understood if his work is fully to be grasped. Twombly gave a somewhat overwrought sexual analysis of the botanic imagery, describing it as "ejaculatory" but with a certain androgynous ambivalence: "The male sexual organ emitting a female form." Whether or not one would choose these precise words to evoke Sullivan's ornamental bouquets, there is no question that sexual energy is palpably present in them, often to a shocking degree. But the homosexuality thesis earned Twombly a certain amount of critical drubbing, and he seems to have become gun shy. His essay here has no hint of sexuality, of either variety—presumably for reasons of political sensitivity. This is regrettable, for sublimated sexual torment seems at least as promising a line of inquiry as Twombly's rather flat assertion that the blossoming ornament of the Merchants National Bank in Grinnell, Iowa depicts "democracy unfolding."

Menocal is less cautious. He happily divides the skyscrapers into "anthropomorphic" (meaning male, rather than human) and "gynecomorphic" buildings, based on their color, ornament, and structure. But he treats these merely as Sullivan's way of doing justice to the whole of nature's procreative powers—that is, as part of a theoretical program and not out of inner compulsion or urgency; about Sullivan's own sexual identity he ventures nothing. The result is a curiously disembodied discussion. When he shifts to formal analysis, Menocal is much better. His account of the stylistic development of Sullivan is straightforward, sober, and thoughtful, and—like Twombly's parallel account of the tall buildings—lavishly illustrated with historical photographs. Perhaps the best aspect of this discussion is that Menocal does not brood over the discrepancy between Sullivan's prescriptive formal theory and the immense variety in the actual buildings. These he accepts as a lively and extended bout of trial and error, the variations explained in large part by different sites, clients, and budgets and by Sullivan's own limitless delight in the pure invention of form.

Sullivan's run of tall buildings came to an end in 1902 when he designed the second wing of the Carson Pirie Scott store (originally Schlessinger & Mayer). His practice collapsed, virtually overnight, and from then until his death in 1924 he subsisted on a trickle of provincial banks and stores, scattered over the rural Midwest. His nine banks are the elegiac coda to his career. These were works of unusual intimacy and delicacy, although in their formula—an upheaval of ornament at the entrance, a jewel box of light and space within—they looked back to Furness's High Victorian banks, on

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which Sullivan had toiled at the outset of his career. Their ornament, however, was the freest and most original he had ever made, breaking free of the architectural lattice of panels and spandrels which had previously confined it. In his last work, the Krause Music Store, a powerful stalk seems to grow upon the wall of a diminutive storefront to burst across the cornice into a floral efflorescence, fulfilling Sullivan's demand that architectural ornament should appear "as though the outworking of some beneficent agency it had come forth from the very substance of the material and was there by the same right that a flower appears amid the leaves of its parent plant."

Such triumphs were sporadic, and in general Sullivan's final two decades were bleak. There was a half-hearted marriage late in life, bankruptcy, alcoholism, and perhaps something else (Wright speaks of "bad habits engendered by his early life in Paris"). Still he roused himself for a final burst of action at the end, finishing his autobiography and his idiosyncratic treatise, *A System of Ornament According with a Philosophy of Man's Powers* (1924), which were commissioned as acts of charity by old friends. The reasons for Sullivan's collapse have never been adequately explained. Changing taste played some role in the decline of his practice. Chicago's 1893 Columbian Exhibition reoriented American architecture toward academic classicism, a shift that Sullivan loathed and which he made the subject of a furious tirade at the climax of his autobiography, memorably associating fashionable classicism with the symptoms of advanced cerebral meningitis.

Perhaps the fall was inevitable after the dissolution of his partnership with Adler in 1895. Adler had been a reassuring anchor to Sullivan's metaphysics, the partner not likely to blurt out the names of Darwin or Whitman in the presence of Chicago's relentlessly empirical clients. Without his sober presence to bring in such lucrative commissions as the Chicago Stock Exchange, there was no counterpart to Sullivan's mysticism. In 1901–02 he published in instalments his *Kindergarten Chats*, a bewildering and verbose dialogue (actually a harangue) between an arrogant architect and his callow pupil. To a patron in search of a tractable architect, nothing could be more alarming. Following its serialization Sullivan never again won a major Chicago client.

Adler scarcely exists at all in David Van Zanten's *Sullivan's City: The Meaning of Ornament for Louis Sullivan*, a volume of five self-contained essays loosely linked by the leitmotif of ornament.[3] In this respect, the new scholarship suffers from the same hagiographic tendency as the old, the habit of assigning the innovations to Sullivan. Of course this is not Van Zanten's fault but is a nearly universal problem in all writing about artistic collaboration. The vocabulary of artistic creation is almost exclusively one of individual creativity, with a heavy residue of eighteenth-century notions of romantic genius. When creativity is personal and individual—as it is in literature, painting, and most music—this is serviceable but it is not up to task of describing the binary process of collaborative creation, where the whole is much greater than the sum of the parts. It is astonishing how most writing ducks the problem entirely by the device of dividing creative partnerships into a designer and a purported business partner, his duties presumably limited to answering the mail and balancing the checkbook.

This undermines Van Zanten's otherwise very valuable discussion of the theater interiors, which have never before received systematic examination. He treats their imaginative variety and great spatial freedom eloquently, regarding them as a kind of sculpture (which in an inverted sense they are). He also relates their spatial composition to Sullivan's two-dimensional ornament, which is too bold of a leap. It is easy to see why Van Zanten attaches so much importance to these interiors. The summit

3 *Sullivan's City: The Meaning of Ornament for Louis Sullivan*, by David Van Zanten; W. W. Norton, 179 pages, $60.

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of architecture—the aspect in which it is least like any other art—is the thoughtful making of space. To be an architect means to compose spatially. The true poets of architecture are those who did so with acrobatic imagination: Michelangelo, Soane, Wright. But here Adler and Sullivan's résumé was skimpy. They specialized in speculative office towers, after all, not civic buildings; their only substantial corpus of expressively shaped spaces was their dozen-odd theater designs. Van Zanten's claims notwithstanding, it is universally recognized that Adler handled these buildings' acoustics—an art which encompasses the shaping of the entire spatial envelope; there is no evidence that Sullivan had any role beyond the decoration and outfitting of these spaces.

Was Sullivan an architect in the fullest sense? In design, composition and decoration, his gifts were sublime. He was also nimble at solving construction problems. The Carson Pirie Scott addition—involving the insertion of new foundations under the original building, whose business operations could not be interrupted—was an engineering triumph. Large areas of architecture, however, did not interest him. Of government buildings, schools and hospitals, public monuments—none figured in his work. Nor did houses, which were relegated to Wright as long as he was in the office. Van Zanten claims Chicago's Charnley House for Sullivan although it is generally regarded to be Wright's first mature work. It is odd that Sullivan, who spoke incessantly about architecture as an instrument of individual expression, should have shunned houses, the most personal of all architectural commissions. But Sullivan was less interested in the specific personality of his clients than in the large anonymous forces of modern American life, so immense in magnitude in Chicago.

Although he spoke incessantly about land and wrote with urgency about the cycles of nature, Sullivan's architecture also showed no great feeling for landscape, or for the lyrical integration of buildings within nature. His work and thought was firmly urban. Here again his pupil Wright was the greater man. For all Sullivan's reverence for nature, it only entered his buildings in compressed and abstracted form in his ornament.

The truth is that Sullivan's extraordinary gifts are the inverse of his equally extraordinary limitations. From the beginning of his career to its tragic culmination, his most essential work—the work that was most uniquely his—was two-dimensional in both fact and conception. The photographs in Van Zanten's book remind us of this. Taken by Cervin Robinson, the noted architectural photographer, they are simply the finest color photographs ever taken of Sullivan's buildings. The highly personal late works look particularly fetching, especially when Robinson photographs them frontally—which is clearly how Sullivan conceived them. One should compare Sullivan's cover for *Music: A Monthly Magazine* (reproduced by Twombly and Menocal) with Robinson's photograph of the Home Building Association in Newark, Ohio. Although the later is of terra cotta, both are in some sense paper designs. This is not sufficiently recognized. Among historians of architecture, only James F. O'Gorman has speculated about how Sullivan's long experience as a graphic designer dominated his mature work.

To say that Sullivan's work was often two-dimensional is not to disparage it. After a truncated education, most of his formative years were spent devising frescoes and ornamental borders for other men's buildings. This cannot have been satisfying to his ambition but to it he brought the full force of his intellect. Artistically engaged but intellectually underused, he inevitably came to invest his ornament with the profoundest personal meaning. In this process, character traits that might otherwise be handicaps—narcissism, self-importance and a certain obsessiveness—were essential, even advantageous. A less self-involved man simply would not taken the design of foliage so seriously.

When Sullivan at last turned his hand to

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the composition of tall buildings, he was the right man for the right time. He saw clearly that modern construction had outpaced the expressive potential of the historical styles. Massive arches, piers, and cornices were conceived in terms of masonry and were sculptural by nature; they were inappropriate for a light steel frame, which needed but a thin cladding of ceramic materials to protect its girders from fire and water. In short, the wall was dissolving into a thin planar screen. Such a screen, mounted across the face of a steel cage, is not a promising field for personal expression, but here Sullivan was on home territory. He invested these taut and lofty planes with almost fathomless feeling. He did not see the curtain wall as an ordered heap of bricks, and therefore inert, but as the physical manifestation of a thought, and therefore a living thing, "designed in a high pitch of sustained emotional tension," as he once put it. The burst of flowers in the spandrels and the gale of tendrils in the cornice were not an afterthought at all, as modernists insisted, but the thought itself.

In the end, none of these writers fully emancipates himself from the old functionalist view of Sullivan. A certain crouching defensiveness about his ornament still lingers and prevents them from taking its full measure. In fact, Sullivan's ornament occupies one of the most sensitive places in American cultural life, the intersection of technological progress and individualism. As a practicing architect in the most pragmatic of American metropolises, Sullivan accepted the technological and industrial forces of his age; as an American transcendentalist, he had an exalted sense of individuality, the invitation to be a "magnificent, man-god hero." Between these two irresistible impulses was Sullivan's ornament, pounded flat by the energies of industrial technology and modern urbanism, but charged with the force of Sullivan's personality—"spontaneous me" recorded seismographically in trembling lines. But perhaps another generation must pass before this can be fully recognized, as the functionalist model still affects the way we see Sullivan, in the way an extinct volcano dominates the landscape long after its power is spent.

A word must be said about photographic reproduction. In contrast to the stunning photographs by Cervin Robinson and Szarkowski, the architectural drawings reproduced in Twombly and Menocal's book are remarkably dreary. The worst of them comprise gray smudges on slightly less gray backgrounds that are impossible to decipher. Most readers will assume that these are faded drawings and that nothing can be done about this, but they would be wrong. High-contrast film would easily heighten the value of the main lines against the background, making them legible. Regrettably, the archives involved here, the Avery Archives at Columbia University and the Art Institute of Chicago, prohibit this. The justification is that high-contrast film whitens out the paper, eliminating its physical character, and causes some light lines to drop out—hurting its integrity as a work of art. It is a valid point, but, like many helpful principles, when applied inflexibly, it produces much mischief. The practice has spread with the professionalization of archival management. As sometimes happens with professionalization, the policy promotes an attitude while avoiding the annoyance of actual decision-making. What should be an essential reference catalogue is in large part a gray illegible mass. This is not the fault of Twombly or Menocal. It takes away from the Art Institute and the Avery Library some of the credit they deserve for supporting this otherwise handsome volume.

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The Spanish Civil War: the continuing controversy: I

The historiographical earthquake

by Mark Falcoff

Only recently, with the virtual passing of an entire generation, has the Spanish Civil War (1936–39) ceased to be a subject of passionate historical and ideological debate. Even so, the martyrdom of the Second Republic (1931–39) has inspired the construction of a remarkably enduring historiographical edifice. Its main lines are well known—that in Spain, the democratic West failed to meet the earliest challenges of European fascism in the guise of General Francisco Franco's military uprising against the government of the Popular Front. In so doing, it presumably emboldened Hitler and Mussolini to venture on to what became the Second World War.

At the same time, the Spanish conflict occupies a particularly important role in the apparently endless apologetics for Stalin and the Soviet Union. Whatever horrors the former may have inflicted on the latter, so the argument runs, *in Spain* at least the Soviets put Britain, France, and the United States to shame by expeditious support of the embattled republic. If the Soviets came to occupy a disproportionately important role in Spanish politics by 1939—again, we are told—the cause lay not in Moscow's ambitions so much as in the failure of countries who should have hastened to the aid of one of their own, rather than crouching behind a hypocritical posture of "non-intervention."

To be sure, almost from the very beginning this view of Spanish events was challenged by historians and participants alike. One such was George Orwell in *Homage to Catalonia* (1938), a book whose literary excellence perhaps eclipses its crucial political message. Another was Walter Krivitsky, a defector from Soviet intelligence who died under mysterious circumstances in Washington shortly after publishing *In Stalin's Secret Service* (1939). Yet another was Jesús Hernández, a former member of the central committee of the Spanish Communist party whose memoirs (evocatively titled *Yo fui un ministro de Stalin*) originally appeared in 1953.

In later years what might be called the Revised Standard Version was likewise attacked by historians left and right—from Trotskyists like Pierre Broué and Emile Témime to liberals like Stanley Payne, but also by E. H. Carr, generally known for his Soviet sympathies, and by Ricardo de la Cierva, perhaps the most accomplished of Spain's *franquista* historians.[1] For reasons probably more cultural and ideological than historical, however, the field has been dominated by people like Paul Preston, a British academic known among other things for a massive biography of Generalissimo Francisco Franco. As Preston himself points out

1 Also worthy of mention is *La guerra civil espanola: una historia diferente* (Plaza y Janes, 1996), by the heterodox Argentine-Spanish leftist historian Horacio Vásquez-Rial, which has not received anything like the attention it deserves.

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in a survey of several recent monographs (*The Times Literary Supplement*, June 29), in recent years the main thrust of Civil War historiography in Spain has shifted to documenting the horrors of the Franco regime, both during and after the war.[2] This serves a number of useful purposes, the most important of which is to divert attention from the troubling questions that persist concerning the republic itself.

Alas for Preston and the Spanish historians of whom he happens to approve, these issues will not go away. After the demise of the Soviet Union, in 1991 and 1992, its military archives, as well as those of the Communist International, were suddenly made available to Western researchers. For some years now the Yale University Press has been publishing selections from this unprecedented source in its Annals of Communism series, much to the discomfiture of some extremely well-placed members of the American and British historical professions. Now comes Ronald Radosh, assisted by two scholar-archivists, to reveal what light such materials shed on Spanish events.[3]

The task itself was daunting, since it required the translation and careful perusal of hundreds of documents in several languages. This volume includes some eighty-one of them, together with a running commentary and notes. Some are very long; others are tedious in the recitation of their detail. A few provide particularly vivid pictures of a country in the midst of considerable political and military confusion. But taken together, they constitute something of a historiographical earthquake, vastly undercutting the long-standing arguments of generations of apologists for Stalin, the Comintern, the Spanish Communist party, and the republic's final prime minister, Dr. Juan Negrín.

Prior to the outbreak of the war, the Spanish Communist party was the smallest and least significant of the left-wing political groupings in Spain. In spite of nearly two decades of patient effort, the party had failed to make significant inroads in the hold exercised by the socialists and the anarchists, particularly over the two groups most likely to support a social revolution in Spain—the urban workers and the landless peasantry. Indeed, as late as 1936 Madrid did not even maintain diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union! Three years later, however, Moscow was in virtual control of the Spanish government and was well advanced in its plans to convert the country into a precursor of the "peoples' democracies" that sprang up in Eastern Europe under Red Army protection after 1945.

How did this remarkable turn of events come to pass? Conventional wisdom has it that the rise of Communist influence in Spain was the product of Stalin's decision to provision the embattled republic with arms, particularly after Hitler and Mussolini poured arms and "volunteers" into the insurgent side. On the face of it, the proposition seems to make sense. Unfortunately, it falls somewhat short of the truth. A letter from Prime Minister José Giral to the Soviet ambassador in Paris, dated July 15, 1936, establishes that the republic sought to acquire arms from Moscow when there was still a possibility that France would honor its commitments to War Ministry purchases. Moreover, other documents reveal that the Soviet Union—far from "giving" weapons to the embattled republic, swindled it out of hundreds of millions of dollars. This it accomplished by demanding the prior deposit of a good part of the country's gold reserve in Moscow, and then, through the imposition of exaggerated exchange rates, charged almost double what guns,

2 "An awareness of guilt: Repression, vengeance and the destruction of incriminating evidence in Franco's Spain." By way of a preemptive strike, Preston begins the piece by attacking the straw man of Western apologists for Franco—nowadays, at least, a species as rare as the unicorn—before bludgeoning readers with the Revised Standard Version.

3 *Spain Betrayed: The Soviet Union in the Spanish Civil War*, edited by Ronald Radosh, Mary W. Harbeck, and Grigory Sevostianov; Yale University Press, 537 pages, $35.

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tanks, and planes should have cost. (On two aircraft alone, the Soviets bilked the republic out of $50 million—in the dollars of those days!) Much of the equipment was old and unusable, and some of the weapons were dispatched without ammunition. The Soviets also charged against the total the costs of feeding, transporting, and maintaining military advisers in the peninsula.

It is true that the Soviets set up dummy companies in many parts of Europe (and also in the United States) to buy weapons that were supposedly destined for transshipment to unnamed South American republics. But, in fact, some of these—including two airplanes ordered from the Douglas plant in the United States—though charged to the Spanish Republic, were sent to China to assist Mao Zedong. Unquestionably the perception—assiduously retailed in the Spanish Communist press, which mysteriously ballooned in size and importance after July 1936—that the Soviets were providing what the British, French, and Americans were cynically denying through the charade of "non-intervention" obscured the facts of the case.

Rather, the Soviets were able to advance their control of the republic through conventional Leninist means—by manipulating key government ministers like Julio Alvarez del Vayo, by creating a network of political commissars to control the armed forces, and by identifying and advancing the careers of compliant officers and effectively destroying those who resisted party and Soviet "advice." This was not always easy, and much of the book chronicles the difficulties encountered by the Soviet embassy, a bloated military mission, and the Communist party in their dealings with Spaniards whose loyalty was first and foremost to their own country—Prime Minister Francisco Largo Caballero, or Naval and Air Minister Indalecio Prieto, or Army Chief of Staff José Asencio. By 1938, however, all three had been replaced with officials more to the taste of Moscow, so that as the actual territory of the republic gradually shrunk, and the capital moved first from Madrid to Valencia and then to Barcelona, the Soviets were increasingly in control of the cabinet, the armed forces, and the police.

The process of getting rid of "uncooperative" Spanish officials was in some ways remarkably similar to what was going on in Russia itself during these years; those hostile to Stalin's rule, or whom Stalin imagined might become so, were accused not merely of Trotskyism and "wrecking," but actually of being agents of Hitler or Mussolini. Thus General Asencio could not be merely wrong or incompetent but a covert agent of Franco. Ironically, many of the very people Stalin dispatched to Spain to apply these techniques themselves fell into the same maw when, one by one, they were recalled to Moscow. One of the few exceptions, Alexander Orlov, escaped to the United States, later to provide one of the earliest authoritative testimonies of Stalin's activities in Spain.

The Stalinist purge carried on behind the lines of the Civil War was not merely about the need to get rid of ministers and generals insufficiently obedient to their Soviet advisers; it also responded to the need to eliminate other revolutionary forces in Spain, those of a different ideological hue—particularly in Catalonia, where anarchists were deeply rooted in the local political culture. The five-day street battle between Communists and anarchists in Barcelona in 1937 has already been told by George Orwell. What is new, however, are the documents (numbers 49–52 in *Spain Betrayed*) that reveal that the Spanish Communist Party, with the support and knowledge of the Comintern and Moscow, deliberately provoked the clash to eliminate their opponents. In theory the struggle between Communists and anarchists (and also the semi-Trotskyist POUM) turned on differences over grand strategy—whether it was best, as the Communists insisted, that the flames of revolutionary enthusiasm be dampened until after victory—presumably for fear of alienating the English and French governments—or whether, as the anarchists

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and the POUM believed, only a society already transformed into a republic of equals was capable of winning the war. In fact, however, these arguments were somewhat abstract and irrelevant; the real issue was political power and who would be left standing after the victory to dictate the shape of the successor state.

The German and Italian motives for intervention in Spain were partly ideological, partly strategic, and partly practical—to gain a new ally in Europe and to test out new weapons. But what of the Soviets? "At the present stage," wrote Comintern secretary-general Georgi Dimitrov within days of the outbreak of the war (July 23, 1936), "we should . . . not assign the task of creating Soviets and try to establish a dictatorship of the proletariat in Spain. That would be a fatal mistake. Therefore we must say . . . do not abandon the positions of the democratic regime in Spain *at this point*"—which is to say, until "the complete destruction of the fascist counter-revolutionary elements, *and then* we can proceed from there, resolving concrete questions" (emphasis added).

By the end of 1937 "concrete questions" had indeed been largely resolved. Although only two ministers in the Negrín government were members of the Communist party, fully 60 percent of army personnel were, including five of eleven corps commanders and fifty-six of seventy-two brigade commanders. The army's political commissars were either party members or recruited from among the ranks of pro-Moscow socialists. Moreover, the party's influence over the military was also accomplished through terror—non-Communist wounded were refused medical aid and non-cooperating officers were denied the weapons or ammunition they needed. Even more attention had been given to control of the police, with a party man becoming chief of security, replacing a Caballero appointee.

Moreover, Negrín himself had begun to think about a very different political design for Spain once the war was over. In a long conversation with the Soviet chargé d'affaires in December, 1938, the prime minister allowed himself to speculate on the creation of a "distinctive new party." Negrín saw this as necessary because efforts to unify his own Socialist party with the Communists had so far continually met with resistance from his colleagues. "But what kind of party?," the memorandum quotes him as asking rhetorically. For reasons of international image, it could not be a Communist party, though the Communists should give it workers "but not, at first, [figure] among its leaders—better to use little known people. The leaders of the new party's organization and propaganda work must be handed over to the Communists." Clearly, Negrín was thinking of something like what emerged as the Socialist Unity Party a decade later in East Germany.

The same document reveals that Negrín was also contemplating a very different political and economic system for postwar Spain than bourgeois democracy. "The bourgeois will not recover their positions," he told the Soviet diplomat, "All of the principal branches of Spain's economy will be nationalized." More remarkable still was his affirmation that there would be

> no returning to the old parliamentarism; it will be impossible to allow the "free play" of parties as it existed earlier, for in this case the Right might once again force its way into power. This means that either a unified political organization or a military dictatorship is necessary.

Negrín, the diplomat added, "does not see it any other way."

A Soviet intelligence report dated February 20, 1937 characterized the purposes of Hitler and Mussolini in Spain to be "to stifle the working masses of Spain, to set up a fascist regime there, and to turn Spain into a base and appendage of German and Italian imperialism." If these were in fact their objectives, the Nazi and fascist dictators succeeded in attaining the first two, but failed miserably in the last. In spite of enormous pressures, Hitler was unable to convince

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Franco to enter the Second World War on the side of the Axis. (The fact that the generalissimo's reluctance to do so had more to do with prudential rather than ideological considerations seems—at the end of the day—somewhat irrelevant.) Without for a moment minimizing the repression and bloodshed of the Franco years, these documents justify speculation on whether indeed a different outcome to the war would have had happier consequences for Spain—and indeed for the West in general. At the very least, they make it impossible for serious historians to continue to claim that what was at stake in Spain in 1936–39 was nothing more than fascism versus democracy—unless, of course, one regards Communism as an exotic variant of the latter, which unfortunately many still do.

One cannot conclude this review without paying particular tribute to Ronald Radosh. This book represents yet another milestone in his remarkable career as a major historian of the twentieth century. To *Spain Betrayed*, as indeed in all his work, he brings a sharp critical intelligence, an uncompromising honesty, and above all an exemplary courage to confront the cherished myths of the left. It is regrettable, but not wholly surprising, that after a lifetime of productive and important work, the history department at George Washington University decided recently that he was apparently not sufficiently accomplished to deserve a place in it—an episode that illustrates once again the fecklessness and mediocrity that has come to characterize the American historical academy.

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The Spanish Civil War: the continuing controversy: II

Rewriting George Orwell

by Stephen Schwartz

Recent scholarly and literary discussion of the Spanish Civil War of 1936–1939—mainly occasioned by the publication of *Spain Betrayed*—has inadvertently shed light on a previously neglected scandal in English letters. This is the wholesale misappropriation and even mutilation of George Orwell's works by a British pedant, Peter Davison.

The link between Orwell and Spain is an obvious one: the great English political critic was transformed by his experience in the Spanish war as a volunteer in the militia of an anti-Stalinist radical movement, the *Partit Obrer d'Unificació Marxista* (POUM). This small element of the Catalan left, whose name means "Workers' Party of Marxist Unification," fought against the counter-revolutionary forces of General Francisco Franco on a key section of the Aragon front in the northeast of the peninsula.

The product of this experience, *Homage to Catalonia* (1938), is considered by many Anglo-American thinkers to be the single most important English-language political work of the twentieth century. It describes the journey of a sincere English intellectual from a naïve position as an antifascist volunteer through the catharsis of revolutionary enthusiasm to hellish persecution by and flight from agents of the Russian secret police. Such a work could not but rise continuously in significance as a key, if not *the* key, to the moral disaster of the *bien pensant* progressives, pseudo-liberals, and totalitarian reformers at the end of the century.

In addition, *Homage to Catalonia* is a model of observation, exposition, and insight. And that is why the "editorial" meddling with Orwell by Davison is so thoroughly appalling. In a new edition first printed in 1989, Davison "rearranged" the textual order of *Homage*, removing two chapters (originally numbered V and XI) to the end of the book, where they have become appendices. These chapters detail the internal dialectic of the Spanish left, leading to a bloody confrontation between Soviet power and the mainly anarchist Catalan workers—Orwell took the side of the latter. They are, in fact, the most important parts of the book.

Inquiry into such a seemingly anodyne editorial decision should begin with the impact of the mentioned changes on comprehension of the work. To cite the worst example, chapter V of *Homage* begins, in the 1938 first edition (which is now the American edition, since Harcourt did not accept Davison's decision and continues to publish the unspoiled original), "On the eastern side of Huesca, until late March [1937], nothing happened—almost literally nothing." Approximately eight lines further, we encounter what could be considered the very nub of the narrative:

> As a matter of fact, there were things in this period that interested me greatly, and I will describe some of them later. But I shall be keeping nearer to the order of events if I try

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> here to give some account of the internal political situation on the Government side.

Incredibly, outrageously, indefensibly, these two latter sentences have been expunged from the Davison version.

What is excised from the body of *Homage to Catalonia* by the loss of these fifty-one words? Nothing less than the crucial moment in the personal history of George Orwell: the turning point, which we may imagine at the center of a set of ripples that penetrate all the differing aspects of our contemporary intellectual universe. Here we see Orwell turning away from his daily concerns as a soldier in a war, reproducing for us the progress of his thought as he recounts and analyzes his discoveries about the political reality, distant from the front-lines, that would determine his destiny. From this reflex, which has come to seem almost miraculous, and almost unique to Orwell, there emerged a recognition of Communist deceit in the Spanish war, indicative of the broader fate of the modern radical left as it extended through several generations and across continents, affecting the lives—and causing the deaths—of many, many millions of people.

The same chapter includes a comment that summarizes Orwell's—and Spain's—essential truth: "since the revolution had got to be crushed, it greatly simplified things to pretend that no revolution had happened." That is, the Iberian left, formed in the environment of Western European culture, dominated by anarchists who loathed Russian Communism and socialists extremely wary of Stalin, had become inconvenient for Moscow, which sought total control over the leftist side in the Spanish war. No non-Soviet alternative could be permitted to challenge Moscow's increasing ideological hold over the worldwide left. To achieve such power, the Russians and their global network of kept intellectuals and propaganda agents had to write the "revolution" out of the discourse about Spain. Rather than a conflict between a non-Soviet revolutionary movement and a military faction bent on its suppression, the war had to be redefined as a simple contest of fascism and democracy, in which the left was innocuous and pliable.

In removing the steps leading to this insight, Peter Davison has accomplished a similar task. Where the Stalinists sought to drain the anti-Stalinist content from the Spanish war, Davison has tried to remove the anti-Stalinist content from Orwell's narrative. I cannot say this was intentionally done to advance the Communist agenda; rather, it seems a consequence of Davison's obtuseness. He claims to have fulfilled Orwell's own wishes, and he seems to have adopted the unoriginal belief that *Homage to Catalonia* should better be considered a book about war than about the failure of radical socialism. But the outcome is the same: *Homage to Catalonia* is eviscerated. Davison has also made an appendix out of chapter XI, which begins, "It will never be possible to get a completely accurate and unbiased account of the Barcelona fighting [of May 1937], because the necessary records do not exist."

Davison is simply blind and deaf to *Homage* as an exemplar of the comprehension and clarity characteristic of Orwell and his style. Jeffrey Meyers, in his recent biography, *Orwell: Wintry Conscience of a Generation*,[1] is compelled to note:

> In a rare error of judgment, the editor of *The Complete Works* moved Chapter 5 (and Chapter 11) to the end of [*Homage*], but failed to see that without Chapter 5 the political discussion that follows in Chapter 8 now makes no sense, and the force of Orwell's conclusion is lost. I have therefore used the American edition of *Homage to Catalonia*.

Scholarship that perpetuates two differing editions rather than creating a single unified text is something beyond idiocy. It will be fascinating to see if two schools of inter-

1 See "George Orwell: changing the climate" by David Pryce-Jones (November 2000).

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pretation of *Homage*, one English, the other American, emerge in the next decades.

Davison justifies his course as follows:

> Orwell hoped that, if a second edition were published, it could be revised. He left notes . . . indicating what he wanted changed; some four or six months before he died in January 1950 he marked up his copy of *Homage to Catalonia* showing what should be amended. . . . The most obvious of these [changes] was the removal of chapters V and XI from the body of the book, transferring them as appendixes to the end of the book.

In other words, Davison has imposed on *Homage* changes pondered by Orwell at the end of his life, when he was extremely ill and, according to Meyers, "in a desperate state." Indeed, Meyers quotes a medical authority on tuberculosis, from which Orwell was suffering, who wrote "it is often astonishing to behold the sinking man make plans for the future;" to this, Meyers adds, "Orwell fits into this textbook case."

But Orwell was clearly mistaken about *Homage* and in no position to assess its future influence. While it had sold only 600 copies in the twelve years since its publication, this was not because of flaws within the book but because of a boycott imposed by the British orthodox left, which had also done its best to suppress Orwell's writings on Spain. (*The New Statesman*, for example, had refused a piece on the Barcelona fighting and then killed a review of Franz Borkenau's *The Spanish Cockpit* on the grounds that it "controvert[ed] the political policy of the paper.") Orwell is also hardly the only author in history to arrive at mistaken conclusions about his work as death approached; Franz Kafka memorably directed Max Brod to destroy his unpublished manuscripts. But Davison is no Brod; had Kafka been his friend, Davison would doubtless have built a merry fire and invited the neighbors for hot toddies. Aside from the mess he has made of *Homage to Catalonia*, there are other aspects of the Orwell-Davison affair that lend to it an atmosphere of grim humor. Great humbug has attended the issuance of Davison's twenty-volume *Complete Works of George Orwell*. One naturally asks what distinction in the field of Orwell studies brought the honor of this responsibility upon Peter Davison.

The answer would be: nothing. The unintentionally absurd element of this saga is disclosed in an article with the revealing title "My Problem with George." A professional bibliographer, he was hired in 1981 as a proofreader of nine of Orwell's books for a standard edition. The proofreader then became the general editor of one of the outstanding modern authors in an episode reminiscent of Jerzy Kosinski's *Being There*, wherein a dimwitted gardener stumbles and bumbles his way into business eminence. Along the way, Davison has turned the work of George Orwell into an enterprise of which the former proofreader has become the effective proprietor.

Davison's vandalism of *Homage to Catalonia* is news because it has just been enshrined in a Penguin paperback titled *Orwell in Spain*.[2] The volume is introduced by Christopher Hitchens whose heart is decidedly in the right place on Orwell. Hitchens ought have been among the first to object to the critical catastrophe that has befallen *Homage to Catalonia* and the dilution of its anti-Stalinism. *Orwell in Spain* will not be sold in the United States, where the copyright is still held by Harcourt. One would normally not celebrate the exclusion of a book from international sales, but in this case it is fortunate. Penguin should withdraw the book and reissue it with the form of *Homage to Catalonia* restored. Harcourt must tenaciously defend its copyright to the original edition, with the 1952 introduction by Lionel Trilling. To do otherwise would be to posthumously betray Orwell and his Catalan comrades, to repeat and reinforce Stalin's treason to the cause of the Spanish Republic.

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2 *Orwell in Spain,* edited by Peter Davison; Penguin Classics, 393 pages, £7.99.

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The violence of Allen Tate

by David Yezzi

Allen Tate displayed all the romantic qualities of a great artist: intellectual precocity, heavy drinking, prodigious libido, volatility in friendship, difficult views, and enough self-interest to bind the lot together. What he lacked was great art. Or so run current estimates of Tate's career as a poet, critic, and man of letters, which spanned some sixty years, up to his death in 1979.

These days Tate's name pops up occasionally in bookstores, never in cafés: he's simply not part of the contemporary discussion. Literary history and her myrmidons, the anthologists, have hacked down his poetic ranks—often to a single poem, "Ode to the Confederate Dead"—and left the rest to lie where they fell, out of print. His benchmark critical prose fares only marginally better, with *Essays of Four Decades*[1] reissued in a handsome, if little noticed, edition. Dusty buzzwords, such as "Fugitive" and "Agrarian" still cluster motelike about his name, but convey little beyond their faint suggestion of a bygone South.

Despite Tate's bellwether editorship of *The Sewanee Review*, a Bollingen Prize, a National Medal for Literature, a stint as consultant in poetry at the Library of Congress (now the Poet Laureateship), and presidency of the National Institute of Arts and Letters, few of his achievements figure in standard accounts of modern poetry. (Tate also donned numerous professional hats, including biographer, professor, polemicist, playwright, novelist, and editor. A zealous entrepreneur of literature, he enjoyed putting a bit of stick about in literary circles, but his chief legacy remains as a poet and a critic of poetry.) What's more, the failing fortunes of the New Criticism, now deemed woefully passé and stodgy, damn him by association in the eyes of those insensible to its continued importance.

Many of the so-called New Critics—Ransom, Empson, Eliot, and Winters—wrote better poems than Tate. On what, then, can his reputation as one of America's most robust and important literary figures rest? The answer: on his influence, still a dynamic force today and a scourge to all lily-livered versifiers of mooning sentiment. For Tate, tortuous language reflected "the aesthetic consciousness, aware of its isolation" that he associated with modernity. "Frost and Stevens at the beginning, Hart Crane in the middle, and Robert Lowell towards the end of our period," he wrote,

> once more confirm the commonplace that good poets are both above and of their age. The verbal shock, the violent metaphor, as a technique of magic, forces into *linguistic existence* subjective meanings and insights that poets can no longer discover in the common world.

Robert Lowell recognized this volatile

1 *Essays of Four Decades*, by Allen Tate; ISI Books, 640 pages, $29.95.

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strain in Tate's own poetry, noting with mimetic severity that out of his

> splutter and shambling comes a killing eloquence. Perhaps this is the resonance of desperation, or rather the formal resonance of desperation. I say "formal" because no one has so given us the impression that poetry must be burly, must be courteous, must be tinkered with and recast until one's eyes pop out of one's head. How often something smashes through the tortured joy of composition to strike the impossible bull's-eye! The pre-Armageddon twenties and thirties with all their peculiar fears and enthusiasms throb in Tate's poetry; imitated ad infinitum, it has never been reproduced by another hand.

Without a proper appreciation of Tate, the full story of recent American poetry cannot be told. Such an understanding, in turn, serves to enlarge Tate's own writing, by providing a context that focuses its enduring vitality, one that shows him as anything but stodgy when it came to his participation in the years of experimentation and invention that fostered early modernism.

Tate, born in 1899, came to modernist poetry quite young, first through the work of Arthur Symons and the French Symbolists, then through the poetry of T. S. Eliot. Absorbing these, he developed a highly distinctive language of his own, one characterized by Delmore Schwartz as a "certain unique harshness of diction and meter" that nonetheless managed to infuse much subtlety, mystery, and emotion into sometimes obscure and challenging poems. The violence of Tate's poetic language and his refinements of modernist technique, along with his lucid and forceful criticism, left an impression on the work of his friends Lowell and Hart Crane, as well as on that of more recent poets such as Geoffrey Hill. Tate's poems and ideas about poetry dramatically altered the sounds and textures of modern verse.

Poets have at least three lives. The first two are obvious enough—biological or biographical, and the life of their work, the corpus that outlasts the corpse. In these memoir-besotted times, the two have become entwined in a way that Tate would have particularly despised. Too often, the allure of the life commands the fortunes of the writing: nothing helps to cement a poet's reputation more than a charged narrative. Conversely, poems receive criticism better reserved for the life.

Ezra Pound continues to suffer from this last tendency, as the recent barring of his name from the Poet's Corner of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York suggests. The dean of the cathedral—who overturned the wishes of a selection committee including Dana Gioia, Donald Hall, Robert Pinsky, and Richard Howard—called it "a question of developing an esthetic theology." Tate, who, with his conversion to Catholicism in 1950, could be said to have done just that, never made this mistake with regard to Pound.

One of his finest critics, Tate cogently defended Pound's receipt of the first Bollingen Prize, given by the Library of Congress, in 1949. "The specific task of the man of letters," Tate wrote, "is to attend to the health of society *not at large* but through literature—that is, he must be constantly aware of the condition of language in his age." Taken as legislators, unacknowledged or otherwise, poets tend to spew the most astonishing hogwash. Evaluating them in this unflattering light pays short shrift to their primary work as custodians of language, a business as necessary and exacting (think of Geoffrey Hill) as that of the pundit or polemicist. Tate felt that Pound's fascism and anti-Semitism

> were chiefly an indignity perpetrated upon himself. . . . I take it seriously in the sense of disliking it, and I cannot "honor the man" for it, as the Fellows of the Library were charged with doing; but I cannot think that it will strengthen anti-Semitism.

Tate's own work has suffered a decline that his biography cannot possibly revive.

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The narrative of Tate's life lacks the sex appeal of the ill-fated poets of later generations. He lived a long, fairly uneventful life, avoiding the kitchen stove, dune buggy, oncoming car, and madhouse. One feels then for Thomas A. Underwood, whose first volume (of a projected two) of the poet's first full-fledged biography, *Allen Tate: Orphan of the South*,[2] confidently builds on Radcliffe Squires's "literary biography" of 1971 (though it lacks Squires's more supple apprehension of the poems). Underwood has performed an invaluable service in cleanly presenting numerous new details of the life, though I suspect that future biographers will do more to bring such details into an illuminating whole with Tate's contribution as an artist. But this may be asking too much of Underwood, whose first work is evidentiary, the judicious sifting of facts; this he does wonderfully well. This volume takes Tate through the publication of his novel, *The Fathers* (1938), about which Underwood writes penetratingly.

The timeframe is a merciful one, in that many of Tate's more scabrous peccadilloes—sexual and otherwise—manifested themselves after this date. Underwood dutifully recounts Tate's inherited racism, a Southern legacy rooted in place and time that Tate later renounced. But his life was complicated in numerous ways, including conspicuous marital infidelity. (An honest account of the second half of Tate's life may be hard to produce, given that certain of the featured players have not yet taken their final bows.) Walter Sullivan in his *Allen Tate: A Recollection* scratches the surface with a ticklish anecdote. In April 1943, Sullivan visited Tate and his first wife, the novelist Caroline Gordon, at their house in Monteagle, Tennessee. Tate's young protégé Robert Lowell and his wife Jean Stafford were living with the Tates at the time, and the novelist Peter Taylor, among others, had joined the party for Easter weekend. On Holy Saturday night, Allen and Caroline retired early, while others stayed up drinking:

> Jean asked Peter if he agreed that Cal [Lowell] was the greatest poet who ever lived. When Peter said no, she threw a jar of mayonnaise in his direction. It missed Peter and broke against the wall. This sobered us up, or let us know how drunk we were, so we cleaned up the mayonnaise and went to bed. I do not know what time I went to sleep or how long I slept, but I was awakened by the sound of Allen's making love. My room and that of a female guest who had arrived late that afternoon had once been a single, large room and the partition was thin. I heard the creak of bed springs and the sounds of passion. Allen's voice and that of the lady were unmistakable; both came to me loudly as they moved toward the culmination.

One hopes Caroline took an enormous sleeping pill that night. Though he could be extremely generous at times, Tate proved, even for his close friends, a difficult character. And these difficulties cling to his reputation in ways unlikely to bolster it. But perhaps, in his defense of Pound, Tate discerned the very distinction between the life and the work that ought to obtain in his own case. If Tate's actions give readers pause, much in his work may be admired without reservation.

A poet's third life draws breath from his influence, the way in which his lines survive in the linguistic textures and allusions of others. In the timeline of literary development—Eliot's "tradition"—Tate stepped in to take modernism's measure, test its uses and extents, and impress his revision of it on his contemporaries and successors. But it all began with Eliot.

To my knowledge no broad survey has yet been written of the influence exerted on poets by *Prufrock and Other Observations* and *The Waste Land* when they appeared in 1917 and 1922. Certainly, the reviewers took notice. Numerous volumes devoted to chronicling Eliot's reception have preserved their responses, both the foresighted and the

2 *Allen Tate: Orphan of the South*, by Thomas A. Underwood; Princeton University Press, 447 pages, $35.

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quaintly myopic. Compendiums of reviews and essays, such as Michael Grant's two-volume *T. S. Eliot: The Critical Heritage* and Leonard Unger's *T. S. Eliot: A Selected Critique*,[3] take stock of how writers—many of them poets as well as critics—scrambled to characterize Eliot's poems, but they consider only glancingly the other, equally vital, ways that poets responded to them in the fashioning of their own poems.

The American South in the 1920s would seem inhospitable soil for the clutching roots of Eliot's cosmopolitan, European poetry. To northerners, a young poet in Nashville, Tennessee, not only reading but also touting Eliot's poetry would have seemed as likely as Confederate re-enactors reversing the outcome of the War for Southern Independence. In his essay "The Sahara of Bozart" ("beaux arts" with a twang), H. L. Mencken pronounced the South a cultural backwater, jibing that "down there a poet is now almost as rare as an oboe-player, a dry-point etcher, or a metaphysician." Yet important poets *were* working in the South in the Twenties, and one of them, the college undergraduate Allen Tate, figures among Eliot's most eloquent champions and vital poetic inheritors.

Just beginning his career, Tate relished Mencken's dismissal, rightly feeling himself and his circle of Fugitive poets at Vanderbilt University to be the antidote to the empty versifying, redolent of wisteria, that marked Southern poetry before World War I—what Tate called "the 'sweetness and light' school." The Fugitive group began as a philosophical coffee klatsch, and evolved over a number of years into a fortnightly occasion for examining each other's poems. John Crowe Ransom was artistic leader of the group, which included Donald Davidson and, later, Robert Penn Warren, Merrill Moore, and, in absentia, Laura Riding. The only undergraduate when he joined, Tate held his own admirably, displaying both brilliance and a headstrong demeanor. (*Headstrong* may indeed be the mot juste for Tate, whose defining physical trait was an elephantine pate.)

In a special issue of *The Sewanee Review* dedicated to Tate's work, Ransom, ten years Tate's senior and briefly his professor at Vanderbilt, recalls that, among the Fugitives, Tate

> had literary resources which were not the property of our region at that time. Whether poetry or prose, it was done in the consciousness of a body of literature which was unknown to his fellow students, and to my faculty associates and myself, unless it was by the purest hearsay. A new literature had made its brilliant beginnings, and there were advanced journals and books which were full of it if we had looked. Besides the part which was indigenous to our language, there was the literature of nineteenth-century France, which after the necessary lag was being imported in volume. Allen in his student days was reading Baudelaire and Mallarmé.

When Tate returned to Vanderbilt in 1923 (after time off due to respiratory illness), he met the new kid on campus Robert Penn Warren and invited him to join the fold. The two became roommates. The group's *Fugitive* magazine, published quarterly for four years, printed some of Ransom's finest poems as well as Tate's Symbolist-infused juvenilia. Their short-lived journal put Vanderbilt (and themselves) on the map, winning praise from Mencken and other skeptical Yankees. While Ransom and the older Fugitives did not see eye to eye with Tate on his rage for modernism, they eventually warmed to the consistent and distinctive voice that emerged in his undergraduate poems.

In Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited,* Anthony Blanche intones passages from *The Waste Land* through a megaphone to students at Christ Church. At Vanderbilt, Red (as Warren was called) likewise paid tribute to the

3 Tate himself edited an excellent volume on Eliot: *T. S. Eliot, The Man and His Work: A Critical Evaluation by Twenty-six Distinguished Writers* (1966).

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poem's power, doubtless for his roommate's amusement: Tate returned one day to find their dormroom decorated with scenes from the poem. Eliot's impact on Tate's poetry was direct and, occasionally, insufficiently mediated. Certain journals to which Tate sent work rejected his poems for their youthful ventriloquism of the older poet. Even Tate's *Collected Poems*, the verses he chose to preserve, bear the marks of Possum's paw:

> The clock has struck a dismal clack.
> They tread the same well-trodden track,
> A hunger flashing in the eye
> Which jutting bellies would belie.

and

> When six o'clock turns round again
> And street lamps light the Dark Siren.

Compare those lines—from Tate's "Nuptials"—with Eliot's "Preludes":

> Or trampled by insistent feet

and

> The winter evening settles down
> With smells of steaks in passageways.
> Six o'clock.

and

> And then the lighting of the lamps.

Where Eliot rhymes irregularly, Tate employs couplets, but the lamps, the clock striking six, the dinner-hour imagery, and the treading feet remain unmistakable. Similar allusions abound in Tate, who later acknowledged the debt explicitly in his introduction to *Essays of Four Decades*:

> What I owe to T. S. Eliot is pervasive. I think now of the relation of a young poet to certain traditions; I still believe that "novelty is better than repetition": that novelty is not noise, or undressing on the public platform, or shouting bad metaphors from the printed page. The two first lines of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" were the first gun of the twentieth-century revolution: the young Tom Eliot pulled the lanyard and quietly went back to his desk in a London bank. But it was a shot heard round the world.

The decorum of "impersonality," the use of the "objective correlative" as a means for managing emotion, a strong engagement with the "tradition": these became touchstones for Tate's career as a poet.

Tate imparted his passion for Eliot to his Southern circle of poets, but it was Hart Crane who had brought Eliot's work to Tate's attention, when both were twenty-one. As Tate recalled to Crane's biographer John Unterecker, "It was in May, 1922. One of the first poems I had in print was in the May issue of the *Double Dealer*—it was called "Euthanasia"—typical youthful title. Crane wrote me a letter. . . . He said that evidently I'd been reading T. S. Eliot." Interestingly, Tate hadn't yet read Eliot, only the Symbolist poets that Eliot himself revered, arriving at a style that rightly suggested an affinity in Crane's eyes. "Tate's return note to Crane," writes Unterecker, began a correspondence that "was for both young men satisfying and helpful. In Tate, Crane found a brilliant sympathetic writer, a man interested in the sort of technical problems he himself responded to."

In time, their sympathies would develop limits. Crane's relationship to Eliot was decidedly more wary than Tate's: "I have been facing him for *four years*,—and while I haven't discovered a weak spot in his armor, I flatter myself a little lately that I have discovered a safe tangent to strike which, if I can possibly explain the position, goes *through* him toward a *different goal*." Crane rejected what he called Eliot's "pessimism" in favor of Whitmanian breadth and generosity. Tate later associated this break with Crane's falling-off as a poet. Sounding an ironic note, Tate believed that, in the end, "far from 'refuting' Eliot, [Crane's] whole

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career is a vindication of Eliot's major premise—that the integrity of the individual consciousness has broken down."

After Vanderbilt, Tate gravitated to New York at Crane's prompting, and was introduced to Malcolm Cowley and his circle of Secessionist poets, including E. E. Cummings. When urban life began to wear on Allen and Caroline (whom he married in 1925), they rented a house in Patterson, New York, and invited the impecunious Crane to stay. Just before arriving, Crane received a windfall of cash and once in Patterson proceeded to lord it over his hosts. He converted the Tate's two attic rooms into a study and bedroom and fitted them out with African art, which he purchased on a shopping spree to New York with his benefactor Otto Kahn's money. Crane required an exalted mood to work on his new epic, *The Bridge*, and the excess overwhelmed the Tates. The end came one night when Allen and Caroline slipped separate notes under Crane's door, giving him the mitten, as the expression goes. Crane left Patterson in a huff.

Tate and Crane quickly made it up, however, and Tate went on to write the introduction to Crane's first volume, *White Buildings* (1926). While in Patterson, Crane finished the "Atlantis" section of *The Bridge*, and Tate wrote the first version of his famous "Ode." No doubt Tate provided Crane with a sounding board for his work-in-progress, and his responses must have had a decided impact. As Unterecker suggests, an ill word from Tate would not cause Crane to destroy a portion of his work, but it would force him to reexamine and perhaps change tack. Ultimately, Crane's new project would leave Tate cold, despite his claim that "some of the best poetry of our generation is in *The Bridge*." The two eventually headed in opposite poetic directions, though Tate saw them as starting from the same place, with neo-Symbolism.

If Tate and Crane came together over Eliot, then it was also Eliot that divided them in the end. As Langdon Hammer puts it in his excellent study *Hart Crane & Allen Tate*,

> Crane, resisting Eliot, approved the self-authorizing powers of "the individual talent" at the cost of standing outside the developing institutions and styles of high modernist art. Crane became a kind of outlaw. By contrast, Tate identified himself with "tradition."

Tate felt that Crane's difficulty was "that of the modern poet generally: they play the game with half the men, the men of sensibility, and because sensibility can make any move, the significance of all moves is obscure."

The difference as Hammer points out is essentially that of romantic and classical (or in Tate's preferred term, *metaphysical*)—what Eliot called emotion and intellect and Tate referred to as "vision and subject" or "abstraction and sensation." When it came to favoring vision at the expense of subject, abstraction over sensation, Poe became one of Tate's prime offenders, with Crane placed in the same camp:

> The obscurity of Poe's poetic diction is rather vagueness than the obscurity of complexity; it reflects the uncertain grasp of the relation of language to feeling, and of feeling to nature. But it is never that idolatrous dissolution of language from the grammar of a possible world, which results from the belief that language itself can be reality, or by incantation can create reality: a superstition that comes down in French from Lautrémont, Rimbaud, and Mallarmé to the Surrealists, and in English to Hart Crane, Wallace Stevens, and Dylan Thomas.

These remarks serve as a bracing critique of portions of *The Bridge* as well. "I, too, insofar as I am a poet, am a romantic poet," Tate explained, but understood, as the most important critics of the last century have, that this tension between classicism and romanticism remained the central question. As Tate wrote of the critic Herbert Read, whom he greatly revered, here was a young man "who was struggling with a problem

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which one now knows would engage him the rest of his life: the synthesis of romantic intuition and intellectual order." It engaged Tate as well, and Crane's later poetry constituted a romantic limit that Tate approached with caution.

As he explains in his most famous essay, "Tension in Poetry," poems exist between the poles of "extension" and "intention," or between the literal statement and its figurative significance. "The Metaphysical poet as a rationalist," Tate wrote,

> begins at or near the extensive or denotating end of the line; the romantic Symbolist poet at the other, intensive end; and each by a straining feat of the imagination tries to push his meanings as far as he can towards the opposite end, so as to occupy the entire scale.

As a poet, Tate countenanced a good deal of abstraction and association, certainly more than his friend (and Crane's) Yvor Winters, for example. Yet Tate had a gift for deploying opulent abstractions while maintaining fidelity to the subject, as in "The Subway," which Winters admired:

> Dark accurate plunger down the successive knell
> Of arch on arch, where ogives burst a red
> Reverberance of hail upon the dead
> Thunder like an exploding crucible!
> Harshly articulate, musical steel shell
> Of angry worship, hurled religiously
> Upon your business of humility
> Into the iron forestries of hell.
>
> Till broken in the shift of quieter
> Dense altitudes tangential of your steel,
> I am become geometries, and glut
> Expansions like a blind astronomer
> Dazed, while the worldless heavens bulge and reel
> In the cold reverie of an idiot.

As suggestive as Tate's language becomes in this subway-as-inferno comparison, the reader never loses sight of the train, the tunnel, the sparks, etc. Tate took pains, and even more so in later poems, that the vision not overwhelm the thing described. Written in 1927, the poem no doubt owes much to Crane at his best, the Crane of "Voyages II," "At Melville's Tomb," and "Repose of Rivers." Tate favored and encouraged this strain in Crane's work, as he favored and encouraged the early work of Lowell. Together, the three poets form a triad of sympathies unique in modern poetry.

Robert Lowell befriended the Tates in 1937. The story of their first summer together is legendary. Tate's star had risen as a poet and critic, and Lowell, already racked by mental distress as a Harvard undergraduate and on the lam from his father's disapproval, came to pay his respects. Lowell had received treatment from the Fugitive sonneteer Merrill Moore, now a New England psychiatrist, and it was Moore who sent Lowell off on his Southern pilgrimage.

When Lowell arrived at the Tates, he emerged from his rented car and proceeded to urinate by the roadside. Tate saw on first meeting that Lowell was cracked, but invited him in anyway, thus beginning, as Underwood reminds us, "one of the most powerful and volatile mentor-protégé relationships in American literary history." From their first conversation, Tate expounded his particular view of poetry. As Lowell tells it, "Turning to the moderns, he slaughtered whole Chicago droves of slipshod Untermeyer Anthology experimentalists," adding that "his second pronouncement was that a good poem had nothing to do with exalted feelings of being moved by the spirit. It was simply a piece of craftsmanship, an intelligible or *cognitive* object." Tate's statement barely hides the specter of Crane that haunts it.

By this point, Tate's own experimentalism had come into an easier synthesis with the tradition, retaining its "burly" quality, but channeled through the decorum of rationality and received forms. Lowell, who had also steeped himself in Eliot and Pound, drank in Tate's pronouncements and asked to stay on. Tate joked that if Lowell did stay he'd have to

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live in a tent. The eager-eyed tyro went to Sears and Roebuck, bought an olive-drab umbrella tent, and pitched it on the lawn near an aggressive cow named Uncle Andrew. Staying the summer, Lowell wrote flinty, dense, classical poems in Tate's preferred style, hoping to win his approval.

For Lowell, his biographer Ian Hamilton explains, Tate and Ransom

> connected America with the exhilaratingly convinced narrowness of European modernism. Ransom had studied at Oxford, was admired by T. S. Eliot. Tate had served his time in Greenwich Village in the mid-twenties, and then in Paris and London from 1928 to 1930.

Lowell's early poems show Tate's influence in their stark images and hard-edged forms. Both grappled with Catholicism, as in Tate's "More Sonnets at Christmas":

> . . . I feared
> The belly-cold, the grave-clout, that betrayed
> Me dithering in the drift of cordial seas;
> Ten years are time enough to be dismayed
> By mummy Christ, head crammed between
> his knees.

And Lowell's "Christmas in Black Rock":

> The moonbeam, bobbing like an apple, snags
> The undertow. O Christ, the spiraling years
> Slither with child and manger to a ball
> Of ice; and what is man? We tear our rags
> To hang the Furies by their itching ears,
> And the green needles nail us to the wall.

The quality of doubt in these poems expresses itself in the "formal resonance of desperation." *Belly-cold, grave-clout, betrayed, dithering, drift, dismayed, crammed, snags, Furies, needles nail*: all convey the violence of deprivation.

Randall Jarrell dismissed the presence of Tate in Lowell as unimportant, cursory, arguing instead that early Lowell comes out of Milton, but so, to a certain extent, does Tate—in the irregular rhyming of "Ode to the Confederate Dead," for example, which Tate derived from "Lycidas." What's more, Lowell wrote the poems from his first collection, *Land of Unlikeness*, while under Tate's wing and roof. What both undoubtedly shared was a fraught relationship to faith. As Tate puts it in "Religion and the Intellectuals":

> As I look back upon my own verse, written over more than twenty-five years, I see plainly that its main theme is man suffering from unbelief; and I cannot for a moment suppose that this man is some other than myself.

If Tate provided for Lowell a model of the modern poet assessing the difficulties of belief, worked out through tortured speech and stark reference, then it was Lowell, with his conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1941 who may have helped to spur Tate's own ten years later. (Tate's wife Caroline had converted in 1947.) In his fine essay on "Allen Tate and the Catholic Revival," the critic Peter Huff characterizes the apparent corollaries between Catholicism and the New Criticism, which could have appealed to Tate and to early Lowell alike, namely "its erudite classicism, its endorsement of the idea of a hierarchy of values, and its apparent sanction of traditional authority." Through Catholicism, Tate gained a toehold on the once-towering traditions that he felt were everywhere crumbling.

Tate's grappling with belief and his particular gravelly lyricism find a further resonance in the thorny poems of Geoffrey Hill, in many respects the last great modernist, and perhaps the greatest poet currently writing in English. In Hill's poems, Harold Bloom has detected Tate's "fierce rhetoric." The critic A. K. Whitehead concurs: "Hill's poetry recalls most acutely the somber music of Allen Tate, who was aware early of the new trends but whose late work, even, is strictly of the older tradition." Ironically, the trajectory of Hill's work traces an arc opposite to Tate's, beginning with the lapidary forms and dense ratiocination that Tate employed and curving backwards toward Poundian

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modernism with its willful opacity and fragmentation. Even so, Hill's work remains consonant with Tate's themes, harshness of diction, and use of blunt metaphor.

As Hill writes of Tate in his brief entry in *The Concise Encyclopedia of English and American Poets and Poetry*: Tate has suggested that the structure of "Ode to the Confederate Dead"

> is "the objective frame for the tension between two themes, 'active faith' which has decayed, and the 'fragmentary cosmos' which surrounds us." As a craftsman Tate may be said to utter the "formal pledge" of art in the presence of "aimless power"; the poems are parables of this persistent opposition.

As the critic William S. Milne has pointed out, this same tension lies at the heart of Hill's poems. "Funeral Music," for example, with its "florid grim music broken by grunts and shrieks" (Hill's phrase), assays the "aimless power" of the Hundred Years War where Tate assays the American Civil War. (Hill takes on the Civil War also in "Locust Songs: Shiloh Church, 1862: Twenty-three Thousand"—"a slow/ Bloody unearthing of the God-in-us./ But with what blood and to what end, Shiloh?") What the critic Denis Donoghue writes of Tate applies equally to Hill: "Mr. Tate's verses are rarely prepared to move freely, mostly they are restrained by his respect for the awful history they inherit."

By Hill's epigraphs may we know him: he places them like signposts, directing the reader onto the moral terrain of his subjects. Consider the lines from Tate's "More Sonnets at Christmas" that Hill floats above his poem "Commerce and Society":

> Then hang this picture for a calendar,
> As sheep for goat, and pray most fixedly
> For the cold martial progress of your star,
> With thoughts of commerce and society,
> Well-milked Chinese, Negroes who cannot sing,
> The Huns gelded and feeding in a ring.

In his sequence "Lachrimae," Hill writes:

> Crucified Lord, you swim upon your cross
> and never move. Sometimes in dreams of hell
> the body moves but moves to no avail
> and is at one with that eternal loss.

Denizens of Hell suffer the absence of God. The loss of God on Earth occurs through the death of belief, a privation that Hill and Tate eloquently mourn.

The question remains: can "influence" justify a poet's career. In itself, no. Poems must finally be judged on their own merits. But the measure of a poet's influence helps to situate his work, to place it in the clarifying light of its engagement with other poems. All poets are to an important degree critics of poetry in what they choose to include and exclude from their work. Tate's poems have influenced not only the poets mentioned above but also his students Theodore Roethke and John Berryman, as well as the dense early poetry of Edgar Bowers (compare Bowers's post-Symbolist "Building and Shadow" with Tate's "Shadow and Shade"). That some of the finest poets of the century have taken Tate's poems as models should indicate that there's more to prize than "Ode to the Confederate Dead." Try "The Mediterranean," "The Cross," "Causerie," and "Sonnets of the Blood," to name a few.

In his essay for the Agrarian manifesto *I'll Take My Stand*, titled "Religion and the Old South," Tate asks, "How may the Southerner take hold of his tradition? The answer is: by violence." Tate, of course, doesn't mean brickbats or the mounting of a second Antietam. "Reaction," he writes, "is the most radical of programs; it aims at cutting away the overgrowth and getting back to the roots. A forward-looking radicalism is a contradiction; it aims at rearranging the foliage." With contemporary poetry so besotted by innovation at the expense of tradition, of vision at the expense of subject, a poetry content to "play the game with half the men," only one way remains to restore what Bowers called the traditional "formal virtues": Tate's way—by violence.

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Three poems
by Frederick Morgan

Recollections of Japan

1.
The garden in the hills
shadowy still at dawn
shows no trace of footprints.
And yet, spring has arrived:
the snow is melting patchily.

2.
Wild blossoms on the river banks
sway yellow in the rising wind:
see—their images bloom too,
deep in the watery clarities.

3.
Warm light floods the countryside.
Summer is all about
and the green takes on a different tone
a shade or two beyond
the green that was here before.

4.
A hasty rendez-vous
on the lonely mountain meadow—
our pillows are of grass:
nor shall we ever speak one word
of this our dew-drenched meeting.

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5.
How long will it endure?
My dear, I cannot tell.
I do not know your heart—
only the intricate tangles of
this dark rich-flowing hair.

6.
No moon in the sky tonight.
Is this cold autumn the same
as autumns now gone by?
Though I myself remain,
am I the I I was?

7.
What am I then to do
when the harsh winds blow through
this withered trellis?
The leaves are turning brown,
I have nowhere to hide.

8.
Through rifts in the night clouds
adrift in winter winds
shafts of bright moonlight pierce
shining remote and cold.

9.
And the ruthless winds still blow
at midnight as I wonder—
would I have been thus lonely
home in my own great city?

10.
A long year has passed
but this is not what I had hoped for.
The parched fields of summer are
far less arid than
these letters from a withered friend.

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The dream

I found myself in James's Great Good Place
or Cambridge, perhaps, a hundred years ago:
long days of Spring, tall elms, unhurried youths,
huge halls of soft stone aging in the sun.
I tried to understand how I had come here.
Was this mild place my proper destination?
Was it a fraud? Or some odd stop-off point
along a further road I yet must travel?

In a great mess-hall underneath dim flags
I sat at table between you, my good friends:
you priestly at the head, expounding, smiling—
you at my right, extending gentle hands.
We solved the world's great Riddle then, so deftly
I knew when I awoke I'd neared the end.

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Pasiphaë

When fair Pasiphaë craved the bull
she took heroic measures—
engaged the famed artificer
to guarantee her pleasures.

He built a comely cow of wood
covered in soft cow-hide,
politely showed the queen how best
to arrange herself inside,

and left her in a fragrant field
where the bull would often roam.
It came, and with a bull's finesse
soon made itself at home.

The outcome was an unlikely lad
half brute, half man, they say—
a tortuous labyrinth was built
to keep him stashed away—

but proud Pasiphaë had her wish
and ruled for many a year
praising the mighty Ocean Lord
who'd charmed away her fear.

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Art

"Beyond the easel": the rise of the *décorateur*

by Karen Wilkin

For English-speakers, the word "decoration" has a pejorative flavor when it's used in relation to art, so much so that it's often qualified with a dismissive "mere." Yet the French term *décoration* has no such negative connotation; it simply signifies (among other things) art that ignores the conventional boundaries of the easel picture to become an integral part of an architectural setting. Fragonard's *The Progress of Love*, a series of tableaux enacted by flirtatious couples in idyllic garden settings, now in the Frick Collection, was a *décoration* designed to enliven the walls of a pavilion constructed for Madame du Barry, the mistress of Louis XV. Matisse's celebrated 1952 frieze, *The Swimming Pool*, now in the Museum of Modern Art, was also a *décoration*, as were the majority of the astonishing *papier coupé* compositions of his last years. Like Fragonard's charming scenes of theatrical trysts and romantic woe, Matisse's evocation of agile swimmers spiralling through a narrow continuous band was conceived as an essential but transforming addition to a particular setting—one of his suite of rooms in the Hotel Régina. (Photographs taken in 1953 show the related *Women and Monkeys* installed as an overdoor panel in the same room.) Neither Fragonard's delightful chronicle of the course of a love affair nor *The Swimming Pool* was less ambitious because it was a *décoration*. Quite the contrary. *The Progress of Love* is very possibly Fragonard's masterpiece, and Matisse's large-scale improvisations on figures, flowers, fruit, and the like are generally acclaimed as high points of his late career.

More than half a century before Matisse made *The Swimming Pool*—about the time that he himself was beginning to paint—a group of his contemporaries sought to establish a dialogue between painting and the other decorative arts, to make painting a crucial (ideally large-scale) aspect of one's surroundings rather than a self-contained, clearly bounded adjunct. These young artists, who banded together in Paris in 1888 as the Nabis (from the Hebrew word for "prophet"), were a disparate, precocious lot, ranging from the Dutch- and Swiss-born painters Jan Verkade and Félix Vallotton, both aged twenty at the time of the group's formation, to the French sculptor Aristide Maillol, who at twenty-seven was the Nabis's senior member. At the center of the group was a constellation of young French painters linked by deep bonds of friendship and common experience as classmates at the Lycée Condorcet and as aspiring art students at the Académie Julian: Pierre Bonnard (later Matisse's close friend) and Ker Xavier Roussel, both aged twenty-one, Edouard Vuillard, aged twenty, and Maurice Denis, who was just short of eighteen.

There may have been something of the very young man's bravado in the group's rejection of the traditional idea of a painting as a neatly delimited, illusionistically rendered segment of the perceivable world, but

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there was also a real sense of idealism about their wish to raise the aesthetic level of the domestic interior, to make art and life seamless. Yet there was nothing particularly rebellious or even unusual about the Nabis's aspirations. Across the Channel, the English Arts and Crafts movement struggled against the mass-produced artifacts of the industrial revolution by preaching the gospel of high standards of design and extolling the virtues of traditional craftsmanship.

France had a long and continuing history of commissioning important artists to embellish public buildings; witness Delacroix's great decorative cycles for the church of Saint-Suplice, the libraries of the Palais de Luxembourg and the Palais Bourbon, and the ceiling of the Galerie d'Apollon in the Louvre. (Braque's ceiling panels for another gallery in the Louvre, commissioned about a century after Delacroix's, are a more recent manifestation of the practice). The program escalated during the Third Republic, apparently in an effort to create images of republican citizenship, but, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, *décoration* also found domestic applications, in part because of the influential Goncourt brothers' enthusiasm for eighteenth-century art and furnishings. Deliciously painted doors, over-doors, and panels of intimate Rococo interiors became newly fashionable, and enlightened, affluent patrons began to commission modern versions for their homes. The Nabis's wish to create entire rooms according to their pictorial aesthetic seems more typical of the time than adventurous. Whistler, after all, had completed his notorious Peacock Room in 1877, more than a decade before the Nabis formed their association.

The quintessential integrated work of art is, of course, the mural, and mural paintings pose special problems since no matter what else they do, they must also, to some degree, acknowledge the surface and continuity of the wall. Too much illusionistic modelling, too violent shifting from light to dark, too abrupt contrasting of color, too much asymmetry, or too much detail can seem to punch holes in the wall or make the *décoration* too assertive. (Of course, too discreet an approach can result in wallpaper-like blandness, but that's another matter.) The epoch's burgeoning interest in all things Japanese helped the young artists to address these difficulties. The economical simplifications, clear shapes, and collapsed spaces of Japanese prints suggested to the Nabis, as they had to an earlier generation of forward-looking painters, the Impressionists, fresh ways of referring to space and form. So did the work of the Impressionists themselves, which offered precedents for the themes of everyday experience, both urban and bucolic. Medieval tapestries, with their flower-strewn backgrounds, schematic borders, elegantly silhouetted figures, and above all, their close-valued, even-handed color, provided yet another helpful example. Tapestries, like Japanese screens, offered models of portable *décorations*, discussed at the time as desirable for the comfortable, middle-class inhabitants of all those new apartments on Haussmann's boulevards. And since tapestries often existed in series, they also suggested how the various components of an ensemble might be related, through color, subject, and spatial conceits. Taking all of these sources into account, the young Bonnard and Vuillard and their colleagues began to explore ways of turning observable reality into images so stylized in form and color that they verged on the symbolic: women in patterned dresses dissolved into rooms full of complicated wallpaper and striped chairs, for example, so that the whole became an all-but-abstract, elusive emblem of an indoor, essentially female precinct, rather than a naturalistic image.

This approach was at once a way of asserting flatness (in a practical, rather than in a Greenbergian sense), unifying the whole, and avoiding the over-specific without sacrificing reference to experience—just what was needed, it seems, for the successful, relevant *décoration*. The Nabis also found it provocative for smaller works. Size wasn't the issue. Traditional academic *machines*, intended to impress viewers and attract offi-

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cial attention at the Salons, were often enormous, as big or even bigger, in fact, than some murals, yet they remained easel pictures, windows into seemingly endless worlds. The Nabis's small pictures, by contrast, depended on the space-flattening characteristics of mural paintings. And if mural commissions were difficult to come by for young painters (they would come somewhat later), the increasing *fin de siècle* influence of *Japonisme* in popular and elegant design alike—the floral motifs, sinuous shapes, and whiplash curves of art nouveau furniture, architecture, advertising posters, fabric design, jewelry, and more—offered the Nabis suggestions for giving their ideas about form, subject, and color a range of applications beyond the easel painting. Which doesn't mean they didn't leap at any opportunity to work at large scale and to create entire environments, or that their experience of thinking about and sometimes executing large scale *décorations* would not have significant effects on their later easel paintings.

Last season, all of these interesting developments were examined in "Beyond the Easel: Decorative Painting by Bonnard, Vuillard, Denis, and Roussel, 1890–1930,"[1] a provocative exhibition organized by the Art Institute of Chicago that presented firsthand evidence of its four protagonists' forays into integrated art. On view were screens, wall and ceiling panels, proposals for stained-glass windows, and suites of paintings—some admittedly much more compelling than others—along with "independent" paintings whose characteristics presumably reflected the influence of the other projects. What was most exciting (and most impressive) was that the show reunited the long dispersed sections of several important *décorations*—well, most of the sections, anyway—offering a tantalizing glimpse of how these lush complexes originally looked. Much of the work on view was seductive, elegant, and delightful; some of it was perfectly marvelous; some of it was just plain silly.

Vuillard and Bonnard, not surprisingly, were the stars of the exhibit. Denis, for all his precocious talent, rarely managed to get beyond slack stylization. His boneless little female figures in an ensemble dedicated to the seasons or in a moonlit, multi-part frieze originally conceived as "decorations for a young girl's room" were simplified to the point of inertness, as though the images were based neither on perception nor on memory (as Gauguin had recommended), but rather on fairly simple-minded, imprecise preconceptions. The happy exceptions were a couple of large ceiling decorations executed in the early 1890s, when Denis was not yet twenty-four, one a rectangular image of women in flowing dresses climbing a ladder to gather fruit, the other a circular panel of women in flowing dresses—this was the era of art nouveau, after all—floating symbolically above tree tops with baskets of spring blossoms. In both, the generous scale seems to have forced Denis to draw more expressively, while his efforts to rationalize their overhead placement by inventing compositions that implied looking up (never mind that the fruit gatherers' positions on the ladder are impossible) perhaps forced him to look at a model and come to grips with the surprises of actuality instead of relying on what he thought he knew. The results, while obviously dated, the way posters of the period are, nevertheless had more charm, vivacity, and imagination than most of the other works by Denis on view.

Later, after the curvilinear rhythms of these early efforts gave way to a stylishly updated classicism—probably inspired by Maillol—the painter seems to have been

1 "Beyond the Easel: Decorative Painting by Bonnard, Vuillard, Denis, and Roussel, 1890–1930," was on view at the Art Institute of Chicago from February 25–May 16, 2001 and at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, from June 26–September 9, 2001. A catalogue of the exhibition, by Gloria Groom, has been published by the Art Institute in association with the Yale University Press (320 pages, $65)

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awarded a large number of substantial commissions. These were represented in "Beyond the Easel" by a group of pastoral idylls, potent evocations of the light and landscape of the South of France in midsummer, populated by kitschy figures ranging from Maenads dancing with tigers to bathers nude except for the most modish of 1906 *chapeaux*. These dubious efforts probably looked pretty snappy in situ at the time, surrounded by equally chic furnishings, but seeing them isolated in a museum setting, in the company of far more inventive work by Bonnard and Vuillard, made them look thin.

Roussel, who married Vuillard's sister, didn't come off much better, alas, although his early work affirmed that he could draw and compose more inventively than Denis. It suggested, too, that at least at the start of his career, Roussel found Puvis de Chavannes's brand of neoclassicism a useful guide. One of the best of Roussel's early efforts, a submission to an 1893 mural competition for a suburban town hall, translated Puvis's vision of Arcadia into a firmly structured image of modern life: a group of women in contemporary dress against an architectural *terrasse*, perhaps at the Tuileries, executed in pale, dry hues that carried with them the memory of fresco. The continuity of the wall was asserted by a unifying row of rhythmically spaced, autumnal chestnut trees against a narrow band of blue sky. Like Denis, Roussel seems to have had his share of commissions later in life, but the selection of these works in "Beyond the Easel" made it clear that he didn't improve with age. Roussel clearly knew how to put a picture together, but it's difficult to know what else can be said. A series of late works that may or may not have been inspired by Mallarmé's "Afternoon of a Faun" was especially discouraging. A catalogue entry delicately commented that "Roussel was not as interested here in delineating a legible narrative as he was in creating a visually pleasing work evocative of the sensual pleasures of life." What about delineating a less than predictable image?

Still, these are minor complaints. The Bonnards and Vuillards alone were worth several visits to "Beyond the Easel." The exhibition boasted an extraordinary selection of their *décorations*, from screens and single or paired panels to rich ensembles. The show reassembled Vuillard's suite of five closely linked paintings known as *Album* (after the largest work in the series) executed in 1895 for Misia and Thadée Natanson, the cultivated publishers of *La Revue blanche* and dedicated patrons. Also brought together were three of Bonnard's four large canvases made between 1906 and 1910 for the dining room of the Quai Voltaire apartment of Misia Natanson, who by then had become Madame Edwards. (These were no mean curatorial feats, since *Album* is divided among the Metropolitan, the National Gallery in Washington, MOMA, and two private collectors, while the three exhibited portions of Bonnard's ensemble are shared by a private collector in Paris, a museum in Japan, and the Getty; the fourth panel, now in the Musée d'Orsay, didn't travel.)

The chance to compare these splendid groupings triggered new considerations of both artists. In other contexts, good as Vuillard can be as a startlingly original colorist and a peerless orchestrator of patterns, he usually fails to measure up to Bonnard for sheer inventiveness, audacity, and subtlety. Yet in "Beyond the Easel," Vuillard consistently proved himself to be a vastly more accomplished *décorateur* than his friend and colleague. His faultless sense of scale, generous touch, and ability to weave sharply noted particulars into fields of close-valued, rich, but severely disciplined color all made Vuillard into a sublime *décorateur*. Color was probably key. In the radiant landscape panel *Walking in the Vineyard, or Promenade* (1899/1900, Los Angeles County Museum of Art)—originally intended as part of an unrealized decorative collaboration by several of the Nabis—Vuillard turned some dull orange, a range of olive-greens, and a pale lemon yellow into a throbbing, voluptuous expanse; he knitted together these assonant hues with

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repeated hits of a neutral, mauve-tinged tan and "escapes" of apparently raw linen. He was canny enough to remind us of the flatness of the wall plane by dispersing his colors even-handedly across the canvas, but at the same time, he avoided monotony by grouping them in variable densities, subtly suggesting landscape space by shifting the scale of his rhythmic touches; they are largest in the foreground, where they become almost abstract patterns, and then loosely coalesce into figures and grapevines as we move up—and into—the composition. (Don't expect to see any of this in the dingy catalogue reproduction.)

Vuillard's brilliant ensemble *Album* is similarly dependent for the success of its individual parts and the unity of its whole on his orchestration of color and pattern. The five panels—three extended horizontals, a narrow vertical, and a square—are like a sequence of panning shots of a crowded salon, a wallpapered room full of women in puff-sleeved striped and flowered dresses, moving among tables decked with patterned cloths, vases of flowers, books, and ornaments. The images go in and out of focus. Acutely observed, economically rendered particulars—the turn of a head, the swell of a sleeve, the twist of a chignon—compete for our attention with a range of ways of putting paint on a surface—dabs, hatches, streaks, stabs. Details of dresses, wallpaper, and bunches of flowers declare themselves momentarily, as though seen out of the corner of an eye, then subside into a sea of pulsing crimson, cream, copper, and a host of unnameable grays. When *Album* is hung as an ensemble, these fluctuations occur not only within individual paintings, but from panel to panel.

Although the original relationship of the sections of *Album* remains in doubt, photographs of the Natansons' apartment record that they were hung against a relentlessly busy wallpaper (perhaps the inspiration for Vuillard's nervous backgrounds) in a room almost as densely furnished and, no doubt, on occasion as densely inhabited as the one suggested by the paintings. The semiotic implications of this (literal) layering of simulacrum and reality are mind-boggling; the visual effect of such complexity was suggested by the installation of the paintings against a re-creation of the Natanson's wallpaper (mercifully in more subdued hues at the Met than in Chicago) and by the inclusion, at the Met, of a few pieces of period furniture. It's a tribute to Vuillard's powers as a *décorateur* that *Album* survived the encounter.

In contrast to the Vuillards, Bonnard's somewhat later *décorations* for Misia Natanson Edwards seemed overwrought and slightly frantic, although they were more ambitious as paintings—which is part of what made them less convincing as a decorative suite. As an ensemble, Bonnard's vast landscapes, with their complicated vignettes of figures and distant spaces, were less coherent than Vuillard's intimate interiors. Staccato bursts of dark and light, bright and dull, constantly disrupted the sense of a continuous wall, despite Bonnard's valiant attempts to turn these inflections into large overriding patterns. In a further effort to pull everything together, he resorted to elaborate, undulating orange borders studded with birds and monkeys, and repetitive patches of black at the juncture of image and border, perhaps meant to signal the artifice of it all. (No, I don't think it is a response to the disjunctive space of the Cubist paintings beginning to be exhibited while Bonnard was working on the series.) The overall effect was rather desperate.

Whatever the deficiencies of the panels for Mme. Edwards's dining room, Bonnard redeemed himself magnificently as a *décorateur* in *Mediterranean* (1911, The Hermitage, St. Petersburg), an inspired triptych, as bold and generous as the Edwards paintings are fussy and convoluted, commissioned for the Moscow mansion of the adventurous collector Ivan A. Morisov. Installed between existing terracotta half-columns at the head of a grand stair, Bonnard's ravishing canvases, which together make an image more than thirteen feet square, turned the landing

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into a loggia opening on to a light-drenched, shade-dappled terrace. A screen of trees frames a view of tile-roofed houses, with the sea beyond. In the foreground, women, children, and pets gather in the luminous shade. The heat is palpable, the sun blinding. We almost have to squint in the glare of Bonnard's vibrating creams, pinks, and golds. Large, loosely stroked pools of color dominate, subsuming anecdotal details of figure and setting, the way intense light does; the trees are backlit, their dull greens and ochres somehow made radiant. After five minutes with this painting, we start hearing the cicadas. The effect of mounting Morisov's stairs and finding this enchanting vision of a dazzling, sun-lit, heat-filled world during a Moscow winter must have been unimaginably seductive.

At the Met, the later efforts of Denis and Roussel were tactfully given space of their own, so that the show concluded with a bang: selections from Bonnard's and Vuillard's later *décorations* (Bonnard's mainly based on mythological and pastoral themes, and Vuillard's chiefly views of Paris and its environs), along with a sampling of "independent" paintings that might be said to reflect their experience of making large decorative panels. Vuillard's pale, nuanced works in distemper were specially appealing, animated by the tension between the dry, fresco-like quality of their fragile medium and the apparent spontaneity of the painter's observations and touch. As a stunning finale, there was a grouping of three of Bonnard's large terrace paintings, paeans to summer pleasures at different times of day and in different moods made between 1918 and 1939 (from the Phillips Collection, the Metropolitan, and the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf, respectively). They were an exhilarating, eye-testing exploration of how near and far, nature and domesticity, perception and invention may all be conflated into elusive structures of glorious color. In the face of such audacious and downright beautiful painting, questions of the relation of scale, composition, and the distribution of hues to the idea of *décoration* seemed beside the point.

"Beyond the Easel" was an intelligent show that enlarged our concepts not only of the work of the artists under scrutiny, but also of a seldom explored aspect of the complicated, messy history of French painting at the turn of the century. Some of the catalogue essays and entries, along with the abundant comparative illustrations, are instructive and interesting. Unfortunately, the texts, mainly by Gloria Groom of the Art Institute of Chicago, with contributions by Jennifer Paoletti and Thérèse Barruel, are threaded through with modish academic pieties. An otherwise informative entry on Vuillard's *Album*, for example, contains an apparently obligatory discussion of the unusual way the Natansons' apartment was organized in "a period when the world of the bourgeois (non-working) woman and wife was defined by the place assigned to her caretaking," along with passing observations about "the way nineteenth-century women were, with few exceptions, defined by their environment."

Fortunately most of the catalogue is better than this, addressing straightforward questions about the history of various decorative schemes and the relationships, both personal and professional, of Vuillard, Bonnard, Denis, and Roussel to their contemporaries and colleagues, including those with different aesthetic aspirations. Most of the catalogue, that is, with the exception of the long, rather ponderous introductory essay by Nicholas Watkins of the University of Leicester, who attempts to turn the exhibition's four protagonists into "marginalized" (in relation to Greenbergian modernism) proto-post-modernists. Apart from the sheer wrong-headedness of the idea, someone should tell Mr. Watkins that it is no longer considered necessary to take a swipe at Clement Greenberg—who admired Bonnard, even if he didn't rank him quite as high as Matisse—in order to establish one's intellectual bona fides. Of course, one can always skip this part. If only the reproductions were less muddy.

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Music

Kidsplay

by Jay Nordlinger

What's new? This is a question we sometimes ask in music, as in other fields, and we ask it both about performers and about composers. Are the young worth listening to? That is a related question. Often, they are, yes: for what they will become, certainly, but also for what they already are. Some musicians will never get any better than they are when they debut. Never will they be fresher, more engaged, or more engaging. Violinists, for example, are sometimes like girl tennis players, terrific when fifteen, sadly more ordinary when thirty. Young violin prodigies we will always have scads of; the instrument lends itself to those hands, and to a certain fearlessness. Every year, it seems, there is another Menuhin, or near-Menuhin, in shorts. Teenage cellists are rarer, and pianists—that is, good ones—are about equally so. Singers? That is another breed of cat. They are still considered "young" when they are in their thirties, for the vocal apparatus takes time to mature. Conductors? Seldom will you see one in his twenties. Once in a great while, there will be a Lorin Maazel in shorts, like Yehudi, waving a stick before an orchestra. But a conductor generally requires ripening, and ample practical experience. As for composers, they can come at any age, and—if they produce something of value—they are warmly, gratefully welcomed.

One thing that seems certain about young musicians is that they have little trouble getting recording contracts. The market is flooded with such recordings, and we will survey a few of them, beginning with that of a violinist, Alexander Sitkovetsky, born in Russia in 1983.

He grew up under the eye of the late Lord Menuhin, and his new album is entitled *Sasha* (EMI 57025), which is the diminutive, of course, of Alexander. The disc features him in "Romantic Russian rarities," accompanied by his mother, the pianist Olga Sitkovetsky. The boy is undeniably precocious, not only by the evidence of this recording—which is not so unusual—but from the fact that he is composing, and had a ballet score premiered in London six years ago: when he was eleven.

Sitkovetsky's "rarities" are little souvenirs, by such composers as Wienawski, Glière, and Glinka, to go with more substantial composers such as Prokofiev. In fact, the first piece on the CD is Wienawski's "Souvenir de Moscow." It's good to hear these little, old-fashioned numbers, which will probably serve this violinist all his life as encores. Sitkovetsky is often sensitive and charming, but his intonation is not reliable and his sound is rather thin at the moment. He has plenty of technique, though: they all do. Double-stops and the like are as nothing for him. With time, his playing will probably grow more robust, as he plays deeper into the strings. He should grow musically as well. In the pieces here, he often seems tentative, overcautious, not letting the music flow naturally. His playing could use

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more panache, more personality, which is strange to say, because self-effacement is usually not a fault of youth. The more typical fault is immodesty, a gross self-assertion. Still, there is an intimacy and shyness about this recording that is not unattractive. The playing is demure, retiring, like a conversation in a parlor. A curious young man, Sasha.

Han-Na Chang, an eighteen-year-old cellist, is simply a wonder. She has been one of the most impressive child prodigies in memory, and she is a full-blown musician—has been for years. I myself first heard her when she was fifteen, in the Saint-Saëns concerto. The remarkable thing about her was not that she was a stupendous prodigy; the remarkable thing was that she was a stupendous—or certainly an excellent—cellist, period. One quickly got over the fact that the concerto was being played by a fifteen-year-old; it was simply being played with mastery, in every respect.

Chang is a Korean-born girl who now lives and studies in the United States. Almost needless to say, Mstislav Rostropovich early on took an interest in her and helped bring her along. Six years ago, he recorded with her the Saint-Saëns, Tchaikovsky's *Rococo Variations*, and other works. He had never before consented to accompany as conductor a fellow cellist on a recording. Of his young colleague he has said, "I've never heard anything like it." Rostropovich's regard for her says more than any critic could, certainly.

Chang's newest album is called *The Swan* (EMI 57052), and, as one might guess, it is an anthology of cello miniatures. ("The Swan," which comes from Saint-Saëns's *Carnival of the Animals*, is the most famous and best loved of all such miniatures.) Chang's tone is big and supple and truly gorgeous. There are no breaks or scratches in it. It also contains several colors and "widths," which Chang employs at will. She breathes and sings her way beautifully through such pieces as Fauré's "Après un rêve." It is hard to imagine a more affecting performance of this lovely transcription. Han-Na gets pretty much all there is to get out of these pieces, some of which are far from great music. Everything she does has beauty, and nothing is sentimental or "pretty," in the negative sense. Never does she emote. This entire recording is marked by grace, elegance, and dignity, to go with a pervasive musical intelligence.

And—to stress—age is no consideration here. We commonly say this in reference to the work of an elderly person: a scholarly tome by Jacques Barzun, a piano recital by Shura Cherkassky. Very seldom do we say it about the young. Yet no allowance, no concession, need be made for Han-Na Chang. We have, indeed, never heard anything quite like it.

An older cellist is Matt Haimovitz, born in 1969. This Israeli-American ex-child prodigy has now recorded—on his own label, no less, the newly launched Oxingale—the central and supreme work of the cello repertory, the six unaccompanied suites of Bach. This takes some cheek, you might say. Rostropovich, who, like all cellists, had lived with this music all his life, waited until the age of sixty-four before committing the suites to disc. For one thing, he approached these pieces slightly differently each time he sat down to them, and he was therefore hesitant to "freeze" one performance, or series of performances, for all time—to leave a testament, the Rostropovich Statement on the Bach Suites. (Still, what a testament, as it turned out.)

Haimovitz acknowledges this problem in his liner notes, when he writes, "I confess some trepidation at creating a fixed expression of these beloved works. How can I commit them to a single path, when each day I revisit and revise decisions on articulation, fingering, tempo or phrasing made the day or year before? Each decision limits and informs the next while also opening a new door with the possibility of unforeseen revelations behind it. This recording is a snapshot of choices I have made over the last twenty years and on the night each suite

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was recorded." This is eloquently said—and of course it is a problem with all recordings, though it is more acute with Bach's suites, which contain worlds within them and are immortal.

But Haimovitz has gone boldly ahead, and little could prepare the listener for the boldness—even audacity—of his interpretations. Right off the bat, in the Prelude of the G Major Suite, Haimovitz employs several tempos in the first few bars. His playing is beyond free: it is full of stutters and hesitations and gulps and swoons. To say that these performances are individualistic or idiosyncratic is to fail to give a true flavor of them. Haimovitz takes shocking license, making Pablo Casals—known as a great liberal with Bach, expansive and uninhibited—look like a stern literalist. Haimovitz's Bach is extraordinarily romantic: one would hesitate to be this loose with a Chopin nocturne. Often, we seem to be hearing not Bach, but Bach-Haimovitz. Almost never will he play a passage straight.

This would be an intolerable outrage if not for the fact that Haimovitz is a very musical being. He just about has the musical wit and conviction to pull it off. Free spirits—or Bach-warpers, to put it less charitably—like to plead that the composer left no markings on these suites, gave no guidance. Yet there are obvious standards, a basic understanding, which Haimovitz ignores. I would like to think that Bach, on hearing Haimovitz, would choke—but then, somewhat warily, accept what the young man has done, on the condition that others would be available to render the suites more conventionally, more faithfully.

To turn to a pianist much in the musical news: Piotr Anderszewski has made a recording of Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations* (Virgin 45468), and along with that recording a documentary has been made—celebrating the pianist and his recording. (The documentary is available on videotape from VAI.) It has been some time since a single piano performance was so heavily marketed. Anderszewski, born in 1969, is the son of a Polish father and a Hungarian mother, and his career has for many years attracted attention. In 1990, he withdrew from the Leeds Competition, dissatisfied with his playing in the semifinal round. Many observers had figured he would win. Anderszewski is the type of musician thought psychologically interesting. Perhaps he is.

The *Diabelli Variations*—or, to give the formal title, *Thirty-three Variations on a Waltz by Diabelli*—are a splendid, formidable, underperformed work, and it is good that Anderszewski has given so much time to them. (They are a staple of his recitals.) He is a solid pianist, if a problematic one. His playing, at its best, is clear, bold, and sharply defined, like that of Maurizio Pollini, one of the most successful Beethoven players of our time. At its less good, that playing is harsh, unduly severe, and wrongly aggressive, reminiscent of Alexis Weissenberg, or of Martha Argerich, when she is being brutal. Anderszewski is prone to accenting notes violently. His passagework has a detached, un-legato quality, resembling Glenn Gould—which is not such a bad thing for Beethoven. He is a keen observer of rests, which is definitely a very good thing for Beethoven. So too, Anderszewski's vigor is appropriate, and his intelligence obvious: he grasps the structure of this rather sprawling work. Yet a harshness threatens to overwhelm his playing, and one might hope that, as he gets older, he will round his edges. But then, Weissenberg didn't.

As for those in the singing trade, the world is bursting with them, and we have a particular abundance of new, or newish, mezzo-sopranos. One of them is the Finn Monica Groop, who has made her name in Baroque music. She happens to be a beauty, which will do no harm to her career; her record label, Finlandia, lays her out like a film star. The latest CD is *Arie Amorose* (29713), which is composed of Baroque opera arias and "arie antiche," or old Italian songs.

Groop is a competent singer, but she will

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not likely make your hair stand on end. Her Dido's Lament (Purcell), to take one example, has the advantage of not being histrionic, but it also has the disadvantage of being a little dull and unmoving. She does not go to the depth of the piece. Handel's "Va tacito" (from *Giulio Cesare*) is more characterful and authoritative. Groop has some heft in her voice, and a nice bottled sound below. But again, the singing is dull, carefully "placed," without much flow. Another Handel aria, the wondrous "Verdi prati" from *Alcina*, should be spellbinding; from Groop, though, it is a bit stiff and unremarkable. Nevertheless, she imparts dignity and stateliness, which are recurrent qualities in her work.

This album is one of those that are rather difficult for a critic to judge: Groop does much that is perfectly correct and unobjectionable; but she lacks that interpretive spark that would give her singing real distinction. To provide what must be an unfair example, a mezzo-soprano of the past, Janet Baker, could make you think, while she was singing, that she was doing nothing special: simply following the music, dutifully. But by the end of it, you were floored.

A final word ought to be said for Ms. Groop: she provides a little kick at the end of her CD with Durante's "Danza, fanciulla." This leaves the listener willing, if not hungry, to hear more.

Possibly the most rhapsodized-about young singer in the world at present is the English tenor Ian Bostridge, an intellectual and specialist in lieder. Precious few tenors have made lieder singers, or song singers at all: one thinks of Peter Anders and Fritz Wunderlich, but the list is not long. The gifts of Ian Bostridge are manifold, as can be heard in his latest disc of Schubert lieder (EMI 57141). He has a pleasant, lightish, characteristically English voice that manages to stay on the happy side of dainty. His technique is adequate, or more than that. And he is indeed a probing and persuasive interpreter of this music. Yet he has the trait—common in singers of a cerebral bent—of being just a little too careful, slow, and reverential in these songs. In the singing of lieder, there is such a thing as being too "poetic," too awed. I often have occasion to think, give me a singer who doesn't approach these songs with trembling reverence, but who will embrace them as flesh and blood! For this reason I have hailed the young Bulgarian mezzo-soprano Vesselina Kasarova, for example, who sings lieder so openly and unaffectedly, if somewhat untraditionally.

Reservations aside, Ian Bostridge is a singer of fine taste and an ability to communicate, and the fuss made over him is largely merited. He has also come out with a disc devoted to Hans Werner Henze (EMI 57112).

A soprano making waves is Natalie Dessay, a French coloratura who has just done an anthology of Mozart arias (Virgin 45447). In these, she shows off her strengths, beginning with the strength of her voice—meaning physical, tonal strength. This voice is not especially beautiful, and it is not especially light, for its general category. But one learns to appreciate that strength: Dessay is a high coloratura who is not bird-like, no Tinkerbell. Her "Queen of the Night Aria," from *Die Zauberflöte*, for example, is militant. Technically, Dessay can do most anything, and she is musically adept. Operatic roles for this vocal type perpetually need filling, and that is why Dessay is sought after by every house.

We should end our tour with a composer, recognizing that they are the most important musicians of all—the ones without whom performers would have nothing to do. Olli Mustonen, a Finn born in 1967, is a quite popular pianist, who is also a composer and conductor. At the keyboard, he is a talented disaster, someone who can render a composer—Beethoven, to choose perhaps his most prominent victim—unrecognizable, from sheer self-indulgence and indiscipline. Mustonen is a kindred spirit of Matt Haimovitz, although the pianist's of-

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fenses seem more dismaying than the cellist's. In the promotional literature about him, Mustonen is always portrayed as something of a musical wild child, whose work, whether as performer or composer, is "hard to categorize," self-justifying. This should put us on guard.

An album of his compositions has been released on the Ondine label (974), and the first of them is a triple concerto, for three violins. (Mustonen himself conducts a Finnish ensemble.) This is for the most part pleasant music, which goes by without making much of an impression. Mustonen is a bit of a minimalist, a bit of a neo-Classicist, a bit of some other things. Often, his music is merely busy—purposelessly busy—suggesting vague emotions. It can be the musical equivalent of idle, empty chatter. The triple concerto is improved somewhat by a spirited Finale, although that, too, is ultimately banal.

Mustonen favors nonets, of which two are here, the second of them written in 2000. It is a nervous, agitated work, whose Adagio shows some conceptual power. In any conservatory, the nonet would receive an A—probably an A+. Yet the question arises, would this and the other pieces have received a recording had they not been written by a popular and charismatic young pianist? I think of Artur Schnabel, who was a dedicated composer and who longed to be recognized in that capacity. He knew that performances were ephemeral, even with the advent of recording, and he devoutly wished to leave something lasting. Yet he would not program his own music, believing—isn't this quaint?—that it would constitute an abuse of his position (as a major, exalted touring pianist).

I should say quickly that it is wonderful that Mustonen is composing, as he has from an early age, for that is the vital musical activity. May he devote more time to it, growing in understanding and creativity. If he, as a pianist, is going to insert so much of himself in other people's music, he might as well write his own, making an honest man of himself. This fellow will doubtless be a presence in the musical world for years—decades? a half-century?—to come. From child prodigy to established musician to autumnal artist: where does the time go?

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Dwight Macdonald *by Joseph Epstein*
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The media

Chandraology

James Bowman

The philosophical question confronting us today, class, is this: Is the stupidity of the media compulsory? Now, before you answer a resounding and optimistic "No!" let us consider, like good philosophers, all the reasons why the answer *might be* yes. For if you assume, as the media do, that the preponderance of those who read or watch the works of America's journalists are stupid, trivial-minded, tasteless, and shamelessly addicted to gossip, what reason could possibly persuade you *not* to cater to such people? It would, of course, be possible, to produce a journalistic *oeuvre* that was over the heads of the majority, but the majority would then simply cease to attend. As it would not be practicable to pass a law requiring people to watch the nightly news, we must make the nightly news as attractive as possible to those whose ability to understand serious political and international matters is—to say the least—strictly limited.

Indeed, our devil's advocate might continue, we find that the existing journalistic outlets are already above the heads of most people. This we deduce from the fact that newspaper readership is declining, as is the audience even for classic television news, and that the only growth areas of the media are television shows, many on cable, and internet sites that specialize in political and show-biz gossip. Regrettable as the fact may be, the market (in which, after all, everyone now believes) requires that such serious journalism as remains must be dumbed down even further if the great American public is not to be abandoned to a full-time and ironically appropriate diet of "Get Smart" re-runs.

Some such thinking as that, at any rate, could be reasonably inferred from the media's treatment of the Chandra Levy story during the course of the summer. "It's a great story for some of the same reasons Monica was a great story," John Moody, a Fox News vice-president, told Howard Kurtz of *The Washington Post*. That is, its theme was "men in power and younger women. . . . Unfortunately, it has the added suspense factor of a missing woman, in many quarters presumed dead." Very unfortunate indeed, you might almost say. "Some people say we shouldn't cover this," Moody went on. "It's a slimy story. But people are fascinated by it." There you have it. What more is there to say?

But are people fascinated by it because the media cover it or do the media cover it because people are fascinated by it? Perhaps we should make another assumption than that of the audience's incorrigible taste for such things—namely that public taste does not lead but follows that of the journalists and writers who make so much of lamenting the necessity to cater to it. Could it be that stupidity in the media is the *cause* rather than the *consequence* of stupidity in the population at large? And could we then posit the corollary that a more intelligent coverage of the news of the day would similarly

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produce intelligence in the populace at large?

The answer to such questions is not simple—to say the least. Clearly, it must be a bit of both. When it was possible to talk meaningfully about "decency" and "shame" in public matters, people might have been fascinated but would have felt to a greater or lesser degree ashamed of their fascination. Even today there is some residuum of shame in many breasts at our Chandra-Monica obsessions—otherwise the pompous concern about the tabloidization of the news would make no sense. Is it not, then, still possible to nurture and develop this sense of shame by making those who wish to indulge a salacious curiosity go (as they used to have to do) to disreputable sources such as gossip sheets or supermarket tabloids? Many of those who feel ashamed of their fascination would thus be helped to suppress it.

One must suppose that any such suggestion would discredit itself in the eyes of our contemporary media culture. Self-evidently, we live in an age when nothing is to be suppressed, especially the appetite for sex and scandal, suppression of which is assumed to be unhealthy. It's a known fact. But according to polling cited by Andrew Kohut of the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, the television coverage of Chandra-type stories—examples of which are the Elián Gonzalez repatriation, the deaths of John Kennedy, Jr., and Princess Diana, the trial of O. J. Simpson, and the Monica Lewinsky scandal—seems to appeal to the same people, approximately a third of the population, and so to have some of the qualities of an unhealthy dependency. Shouldn't the media, like the tobacco companies about which they are so routinely critical, bear a heavy responsibility for their customers' addiction to their product?

Of course, this doesn't occur to them because they imagine that their product is "the truth"—*and you can never have too much of that, right?* This is one reason why the media pack are so insistent on politicians' not "lying." The massive invasion of Gary Condit's privacy is justified in many minds because he "lied" to the media in first denying an affair with Miss Levy, which was also the excuse for the media's pursuing its prurient interest in Bill Clinton's dalliance with Monica Lewinsky. Clinton's case differed, of course, in that he lied under oath—an oath which a foolish sexual harassment statute he himself had signed into law gave his enemies an opportunity to administer. But this was a legal nicety which was often forgotten amid the promiscuous charges of "lying," now being repeated in the Condit case—as if lying to CNN and to a court of law were morally equivalent.

For there is a reason why oaths are administered in court. It is not just because they are thought to make truth-telling more likely, or lying punishable, but also because they are an assertion of the court's and therefore the community's right to ask the questions in the first place. There can be no lie where there is no obligation of faith. You might as well say that a boxer's or a general's feint in attempting to deceive an opponent is a lie. Mr. Condit owed an obligation of faith to his wife and an obligation of honor to the police. His failure to live up to both obligations was certainly despicable, but that did not make his lies any more the business of the media, to whom he owed no obligation of faith. Nor did the obligation he owed to his constituents extend to periodic updates on whom he was sleeping with.

If he murdered her, there is a story, and the press is clearly hoping that the discovery of a body will finally justify their excesses. "Trust me; her head is in his freezer," as another reporter told Howard Kurtz. Well, we can certainly trust that the media—in particular CNN and other networks for whom a long-running story like this is the very oxygen of life—are fervently hoping it is. But even if he is guilty, he will have been tried and convicted in the media long before there is anything like enough evidence for a proper trial. One can look for-

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ward to an O. J.-type trial and verdict, therefore, and yet more grist for the media's mill. Who can justify this?

One attempt to justify it is on the grounds that all the media attention will help focus police energies. Without it, poor Chandra would be treated just like any other missing person:

> This sort of leaking is part of the media orchestration that began with Levy's parents taking their case to television. "Are we spun? You bet," CNN correspondent Bob Franken said on the air, adding: "You have the spinmeister lawyers who have been hired: Abbe Lowell, who's very expert; Billy Martin [the Levy family attorney], who's very expert. They have hired public relations people to promote the story. As a matter of fact, it is very obvious that the reason that this aunt came forward was because she was being used as part of a coordinated media campaign, no doubt about it."

This, for Tunku Varadarajan of *The Wall Street Journal*, seems to be enough to justify not only the outpouring of media speculation about Condit but also almost any tabloid story the press is inclined to blow up into a news-channel bonanza. Perhaps some such idea was in Maureen Dowd's mind when she found a high moral purpose in the coverage, which her own paper had been characteristically squeamish about:

> This is not merely a scintillating tabloid story. This is the stuff of great drama and novels and journalism through the ages. It's just as legitimate as covering the patients' bill of rights or campaign finance, maybe more so, because here the press has a crucial role in forcing out the truth.
>
> This is a classic story about whether a powerful man can put himself above the law, and about the unappetizing inequity of relationships in Washington between older married officials and young, needy women.

Miss Dowd's chirpy assumption that the whole thing had been put together as entertainment for herself was echoed by her *New York Times* op-ed page colleague, Frank Rich:

> "A.I." tanked, "Pearl Harbor" is already history, and "Jurassic Park III" is getting sub-two-star reviews. The nation yawned at the prospect of a man holding a knife to a woman's throat on "Big Brother 2," and the hottest title that American publishing can come up with for a beach read is "John Adams." The Mrs. Robert Blake mystery had no legs, and New York's own summertime pride and joy, the Lizzie Grubman saga, lacks two essential elements that might make it fly west of the Hudson, sex and death.
>
> Under these desperate circumstances, America, summer of '01, was fated to become Condit Country. And what a terrific place it is.

"I love this story," says Rich, who offers up a pro forma disclaimer that

> (1) My paramount concerns—of course—are for Chandra Levy and for justice. (2) My secondary concern is for the Broader Themes, which include the scandalous behavior of our public servants, the limits of privacy and the presumption of innocence, the fate of women in the workplace, the balance of power in the House, and the heroism of the media in selflessly seeking out the truth.

This kind of flip irony, presumably thought by the writers and their admirers to be very sophisticated and the occasion for much exercise of wit, had its greatest triumph three years ago when Miss Dowd all but single-handedly saved the Clinton presidency by the brilliant stroke of seizing the occasion of the issue of the Starr Report to review it as if it were a work of fiction. Soon this became the official Clintonite line, and members of Congress (including Gary Condit) who only days before had been signaling that Clinton's goose was cooked were suddenly inclined to criticize Starr instead, for the alleged prurience of his interest in Clinton's sex life. Now even Mr.

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Varadarajan and the great and good Florence King of *National Review* think it natural to write of scandal stories as if they were entertainment rather than news.

Thus Sally Quinn in *The Washington Post* apostrophized the congressman: "Don't you realize you have cast yourself in the recurring role of every clichéd Hollywood movie, every summer thriller?" Wow! Maybe he should sack his agent. What was he thinking with that casting? Scott Turow, the well-known lawyer and author of *Presumed Innocent* and other crime novels, wrote in *The Wall Street Journal*:

> To me, the most notable thing about the wildfire attention that has befallen this case is that the entire tale has the quality of a sequel. Whether the Condit/Levy investigation is viewed as "Impeachment Lite" or "O. J. Goes to Congress," the story that the media have been telling us—and which Americans have been eager to hear again—is by now as familiar in its elements as "Jurassic Park III."
>
> Around water coolers and Internet chat rooms, Americans amuse themselves by trying to guess which of the surprise endings they know from novels and movies will prove out in this case. Is it "Absolute Power" (the congressman did it) or "Presumed Innocent" (the wife did it)? Or is it a grand new twist—a jilted Chandra hiding in an act of revenge aimed at bringing down her congressman lover?

To his credit, Mr. Turow writes to warn us that such stories, "no matter how meaningful or important in their deeper messages about our culture, have every appearance of having overpowered the facts."

> The willingness of the press, especially the cable outlets, to sell us the story we want to believe, as opposed to a dispassionate rendition of the facts, is not unique to this case, but it remains disturbing. And so is the American inability to distinguish the nightly news from popular narrative. What is happening here goes well beyond where news-as-entertainment has taken us before. This is not merely the trivial trumping the significant—Oscar-night apparel getting more attention than a foreign plane crash that kills hundreds. In this instance, a vital link—Mr. Condit's role in the likely violence that befell Ms. Levy—is simply being assumed with virtually no basis, just so the story sells.

But now the smart set has joined the scandal-addicted mob in concluding that an intrusive interest in other people's lives is okay so long as we are entertained by it. Scandal is reality-TV for the media elite, who regard any objection to it as merely prudish. Miss King compares those who profess a lack of interest in Chandra and Gary to those who claim (falsely, no doubt) to buy *Playboy* for the articles.

I don't know how recently Florence King has seen a copy of *Playboy*, but I can tell her that the articles, bad or boring as most of them are, are still more interesting than the monthly parade of pneumatic lovelies with their grotesque breast implants and their tastefully waxed pudenda. I myself don't buy it for either of these things but rather for the celebrity nudes. Not only do they look (usually) more like real women and therefore more erotic, but they are a constant reminder of what otherwise decent people are willing to do for even the smallest corner of the blanket of celebrity. I find the pathos of that all consuming desire, that willing sacrifice of reticence and modesty to a meretricious and self-destructive dream of immortality, rather an intellectual turn-on.

The fashionable view of news-as-entertainment reveals the extent to which tabloidization is not incidental to the growth of journalistic culture and values but of their very essence. The taste for hidden truths is justified precisely by the fact that they are hidden. Paul Light, vice-president and director of governmental studies at the Brookings Institution, told *The Washington Post* that the Condit story "has pushed the limits of what we are willing to believe our politicians are capable of." Not that there has been much that we haven't been willing to

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believe them capable of for some time, at least if the popular culture—where lying, thieving, murdering politicians are the norm rather than the exception—is anything to go by. Anyway, it seems probable that it is the confirmation of this distrust and not merely idle speculation about poor Chandra's fate which is the point of the media's obsession with the story.

For the model of reality so enthusiastically adopted by the news media ever since the 1960s has assumed that the bland pronouncements of officialdom are always a mask for sordid or discreditable realities underneath—realities which it is (not coincidentally) the quasi-constitutional function of the news media to adumbrate. Thus it is almost necessary to assume that Condit, like Johnson, Nixon, Reagan, Bush, and Clinton before him, was guilty before he said or did anything—a fact which naturally contributed to the sensation created by the media that his reticence about sharing with them and the world the sordid details of his infidelities was, like more or less everything he said and did, redolent of guilt.

Thus it was that in a Fox News call-in poll—or "poll"—69 percent of those who called said Rep. Condit somehow made Miss Levy disappear, while 14 percent thought it was the intern herself and 17 percent someone else entirely. Those are the numbers that journalists like to see, because they justify them in digging out "the truth"—which becomes recognizable as the truth precisely because it has to be dug out. As an ironclad, unfalsifiable guarantee of the press's right, even duty, to go on bulldozing the fragile lean-tos where privacy still, here and there, manages to huddle for shelter, this kind of assumption as to where and how truth is to be found takes a lot of beating, but it is a result of circular reasoning.

The one honorable exception to the press's unbridled commitment to Chandraology was Dan Rather and "The CBS Evening News," whose fastidiousness briefly became almost as interesting to the rest of the media as Chandra herself was. Certainly there was a whiff of sanctimoniousness to CBS's high-mindedness, and Jonathan Yardley of *The Washington Post* was having none of it:

> The hunch here is that CBS got beat on the story and decided that, rather than lumber in late with yesterday's news, it would corner the high road by going holier than thou. This would score points with all the usual people who had commenced making all the usual complaints about "salacious and irresponsible" journalism and thus would enable Rather and his colleagues to get into Heaven with a wink and a nod from Saint Peter.
>
> This by contrast with the rest of us low-down newshounds, slavering away down there in the dirt and the slime, flinging aside our "dignity" as we elbow each other in hot pursuit of the latest juicy (and no doubt morally reprehensible) tidbit.

At least Yardley acknowledges the low-down nature of the press in pursuing the Chandra story, though he doesn't seem to mind it much—a breath of fresh air when you compare his attitude with that of the designated worriers among "media watchdogs" and professors of "journalistic ethics" who feel constrained to justify it all in high moral terms. Mind you, it must be a relief to someone like Lanny Davis, one of the networks' favored "commentators," to find himself on the other side of the argument, where he can get that warm inner glow of self-approval for his interest in gossip and scandal by saying that a young woman's safety is "more important" than Gary Condit's privacy.

Well sure. But what wasn't more important than Gary Condit's privacy? Most of the details of his affairs and his sexual behavior that received such wide currency have made no contribution to the effort to find Chandra, though they were eagerly snapped up just the same, to keep the machinery of the all-news networks humming. Even Dan Rather's splendid refusal came under suspicion when it began to be rumored that it made him the front-runner

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for the great "get" of the affair—an interview with Gary Condit, which would certainly be a ratings bonanza for CBS. The only greater one would have been a girl-to-girl sit-down, like Barbara Walters's with Monica, with Chandra herself. There would be ratings to kill for! Or, indeed, to die for. But hopes for Chandra were by now beginning to fade.

The Rather-not approach did reveal the extent to which the debasement of public taste still crucially depends on the pack mentality of those who can claim that they're reluctant to pursue the story, but if they don't someone else will. As James Poniewozik observed in *Time*:

> Perhaps the most telling lesson about today's media in Rather's high-profile dissent is that this sort of thing is so rare. More typically, outlets decide a story is news because everyone else is doing it, a gentleman's agreement that absolves any individual of blame. Perhaps that's why the resentment of CBS was so vehement. Critics questioned Rather's news sense and argued that the CBS Evening News was taking the high road as a marketing gimmick. To some, Rather was the prude at the bachelor party who needed to have a tequila shot and a lap dance and to stop pretending he was better than everyone else.

Here we come to the mainspring of the scandal-machine, which is a form of envy: the basest human impulse of the *homme moyen*—or a little above the *moyen*—*sensuel* to delight in any evidence that other people, particularly if they are in positions of authority, are no better than he is. It has not always been so, perhaps. Only a decade or so ago, the self-righteousness of those who clucked their tongues at Gary Hart and drove him out of politics may have been equally unlovely, but at least it served some social function. "Back then," wrote Roxanne Roberts in *The Washington Post*, "scandals were a kind of morality tale: When caught, most players responded with contrition and took the consequences. Peer and party pressure helped to quickly push resignations."

In such cases, authority was reinforced rather than undermined. People who did things not in keeping with the gravity of their office were forced to go. But, Miss Roberts continues, "public tolerance for misdeeds has changed over the years; many voters said they didn't care much about Clinton's private life. More politicians refuse to bow to public or party pressure. Scandals are less predictable and therefore more problematic for all concerned." What she does not say is that this change is the result of a demographic shift. The difference between 1988 and 1998 was that by the latter date, the preponderance of the adult electorate had grown up after, instead of before, the sexual revolution wrought by the birth control pill in the mid-1960s. For the new majority, casual sex was no big deal. Even most of those in monogamous relationships had had some history of promiscuity. We were the more receptive to the idea that "they all do it" because we all had done it.

At any rate, it was that argument which helped to keep Clinton in power when Gary Hart had been disgraced for a far lesser offense. It was an argument both congenial to the media, who got and still get their bread and butter by such an assumption, and destructive to the very principles of republican government. Not that there is much prospect of the media's ever bothering about *that*. But it doesn't seem too much to hope for that it might bother some significant proportion of the rest of us enough to deprive ourselves of the entertainment of seeing poor Mr. Condit squirming on the end of the media's skewer.

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Books

Edna St. Vincent Millay's doubly burning candles

by X. J. Kennedy

For a long while, the case of Edna St. Vincent Millay has seemed a doleful one. In 1911 it was her fate to ignite a sensation with her first collection, *Renascence*; in 1923, to be the first woman poet to win a Pulitzer Prize; throughout the 1920s and 1930s, to enjoy more critical acclaim and popularity than poets ordinarily attain; but in later life to be dismissed as a moldy fig. She has very nearly gone the way of lesser poets who make the mistake of signing their work with three names. Her *Collected Poems* is no longer a fixture on the poetry shelf of every bookshop, and in the initial volume of the Library of America's anthology of twentieth-century American poetry, she places a mere fourth among woman poets in the number of allotted pages—about a third the space squandered on the maunderings of Gertrude Stein. Perhaps now, with the simultaneous appearance of two new critical biographies[1] derived from long-guarded materials, her stock may be in for a rise.

Like earlier biographers, both Daniel Mark Epstein and Nancy Milford portray Millay as a gallant child. While her divorced mother Cora, a practical nurse, worked night and day, Millay served as surrogate mother to her two younger sisters: cooking, baking, cleaning, mending, scrubbing till she bloodied her hands. All the while, she excelled in school, acted in plays, practiced piano, and won poetry prizes. For much of her early life, the family lived on the charity of relatives, and when at last they found a house of their own it was in a tough section of Camden, Maine, where drunken mill workers would try unsuccessfully to break in and rape the girls on a Saturday night. While high school friends trotted off to college, Millay, poor and burdened with duties, couldn't go.

The familiar myth is that by sheer talent Millay managed to liberate herself from a hardscrabble existence, and indeed, from all evidence, this account is true. When she entered the poem "Renascence" in a national contest, it narrowly failed to win but received such extravagant praise that the winner felt too humiliated to show up in person to claim his prize. This feat brought her a New York woman patron who took her in hand and saw to it that Vassar accepted her.

Despite some archaic diction and inversions of syntax ("Ah! Up then from the ground sprang I"), "Renascence" remains a striking achievement for a poet of nineteen. Indeed, it would have done credit to any American poet of 1911, but it does have a certain youthful gushiness. Like many poems that aspire to win contests, it wears on its sleeve a cosmic significance. The speaker's feeling of being trapped by the surrounding

1 *What Lips My Lips Have Kissed: The Loves and Love Poems of Edna St. Vincent Millay*, by Daniel Mark Epstein; Henry Holt, 288 pages, $26.
Savage Beauty: The Life of Edna St. Vincent Millay, by Nancy Milford; Random House, 553 pages, $29.95.

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hills and islands of Camden, Maine, leads to a near-mystical experience. Infinity and eternity drop down upon her. She takes responsibility for all the sins of the human race, becomes one with a starving man (from Capri, so as to rhyme with "me"), dies a thousand deaths, then sinks into her grave. From such a low point, where could she go but up? She exults, hugs trees, even embraces the ground. She beholds God everywhere. Oddly, the poem ends with a twit at people who don't feel so intensely: "And he whose soul is flat—the sky/ Will cave in on him by and by." Apparently "Renascence" was begun in a period of gloom, set aside, then finished in a moment of elation. Epstein places the turning point of its composition in the young poet's visit to the town of Kingman, where she enjoyed a brief reconciliation with her father, attracted the resident young blades, and flirted with the fiddle player of the Kickapoo-Laguna Vaudeville Medicine Show. Life could be beautiful.

In both these new lives of the poet, much is made of Millay's physical beauty and her flamboyant theatricality. On the streets of Camden, passersby would stop to gape at the slim, pale girl with long, flowing red hair. Later, Arthur Ficke, who had been a lover, called her disproportionately large breasts "the most curiously 'naked' breasts I have ever seen." Her unconventional beauty—clear green eyes, pouty little-bad-girl mouth—would draw both men and women to her as a magnet attracts loose staples. Epstein has perceived her tendency to mimic the poses of her idol, the tempestuous Sarah Bernhardt, whom the young Millay had watched in *Camille*. "Acting," he remarks, "came as naturally to her as breathing; she created several different roles for herself in the private world of her imagination before she ever began to play roles for her friends, her lovers, and the public."

Giving readings in her maturity, Millay would put on an overpowering show. She would look the part of a poet, typically draped in a loose velvet gown with red-and-gold braid, girdle-free, flicking a black velvet cape behind her as she strode. Audiences were surprised when out of her elfin form came a rich contralto voice like (said one reporter) "a bronze bell." Reciting from memory, she would act her poems with her whole body, winning thunderous applause. Long before the reading tours of Dylan Thomas, Millay was traipsing the continent. She knew how to bowl 'em over in Des Moines.

In the strict enclave of Vassar, Millay had the advantages of being four years older than the other freshmen and of being already a poet of national fame. When she starred in a campus production of Synge's *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, the *New York Tribune* sent its drama critic. Her celebrity quite intimidated Vassar's president, Henry Noble McCracken. Though she habitually tippled, ducked chapel, cut classes, and skipped away from campus without leave, he told her, "You couldn't break any rule that would make me vote for your expulsion. I don't want a banished Shelley on my doorstep." To which she replied, "Well, on those terms I think I can continue to live in this hellhole." And so she did, absorbing all that Vassar could provide, dazzling her teachers with her papers, taking every modern language course the college offered, and obtaining a good grounding in Latin besides. As far as I know, no later rebel poet, no celebrated Beat, brought to the writing of poetry a more conscientious schooling.

Epstein sees her college days as busily androgynous. He envisions Millay's keeping "a harem of sex-starved Vassar girls eager for same-sex experiments" while at the same time sharing the bed of Arthur Hooley, a New York editor who printed her poems. Epstein credits this cool and reticent Englishman with teaching Millay, by his example, to stay in control of an affair and not hand over her entire heart. He suspects that her involvement with Hooley may have inspired this remarkable early sonnet:

> If I should learn, in some quite casual way,
> That you were gone, not to return again—
> Read from the back-page of a newspaper, say,

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Held by a neighbor in a subway train,
How at the corner of this avenue
And such a street (so are the papers filled)
A hurrying man—who happened to be you—
At noon today had happened to be killed,
I should not cry aloud—I could not cry
Aloud, or wring my hands in such a place—
I should but watch the station lights rush by
With a more careful interest on my face,
Or raise my eyes and read with greater care
Where to store furs and how to treat the hair.

This poem, sometimes mistaken for a statement of cool indifference, is quite the opposite. Millay sees deeply into the psychology of feeling. Her poem recalls Dostoyevsky's recollection of the moment when, facing a firing squad, he concentrated his gaze intently on the brass buttons on the coats of the fusiliers.

About Millay's college days, Milford is more cautious in her inferences. From her account, the poet's life at Vassar doesn't seem quite a "four-year bacchanal," but a pack of girlish intrigues with just a smattering of lesbian dalliance. Arthur Hooley shrinks into the background, and it is the playwright Floyd Dell who shatters the poet's virginity. But whoever the man responsible, both biographers report that Millay converted to heterosexuality with religious zeal. Epstein totes up no fewer than one hundred love-affairs in her lifetime. According to Epstein, one afternoon, between two other quick tricks, she barely had time to sandwich in John Peale Bishop.

It was a balancing act comparable in skill to that of a Casanova or Don Juan. Shrewdly, Millay juggled her many lovers: discreetly keeping secrets, gracefully breaking off affairs, and letting her victims down so gently that several remained her friends for life. Edmund Wilson never got over her. In his mercifully forgotten novel *I Thought of Daisy*, he portrayed her, thinly veiled, as the irresistible queen of a Greenwich Village hive. At the time, Millay didn't mind serving as a fictional heroine, but regretted that Wilson hadn't given her a better novel in which to star.

In 1920, in the early morning of her fame, Millay's now almost tiresomely familiar quatrain "First Fig" earned her notoriety as a flapper and a frequenter of wild parties:

My candle burns at both ends;
It will not last the night;
But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends—
It gives a lovely light!

Milford calls this little poem the rallying cry of a new generation of American women, and apparently it did wonders for Millay's sales.

In both biographies Millay emerges as a committed idealist, albeit one not averse to having her public gestures make the newspapers. She embraced many a decent cause, demonstrating against the Wilson administration's effort to gag the magazine *The Masses* (whose editors had doubted that the War to Make the World Safe for Democracy was entirely altruistic) and briefly going to jail for protesting the death sentences handed Sacco and Vanzetti. She was ahead of many of her fellow countrymen in disliking Hitler and, well before the Pearl Harbor attack, bought the embattled British an ambulance.

She could be generous to people in need. When her shiftless father pleaded illness and poverty, she forgave his having virtually abandoned his family and sent him support checks for the rest of his life. She strove to advance the careers of fellow poets, notably Elinor Wylie and Louise Bogan, and toiled as an anonymous sifter of Guggenheim applications. Her taste and sense of fairness were such that she could recommend E. E. Cummings for a grant despite her personal dislike for him.

Her leftward leanings seem never to have prevented her from enjoying the capitalist system to the hilt. At the height of her career, her book royalties were handsome and her readings drew throngs eager to behold a woman whose lovers were beyond count. At a time when she was the best-paid poet in America, she invested in a personal

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stable of race horses, owning a colt named Challedon who dashed her hopes by placing a mere second in the Kentucky Derby. Milford mentions Millay's wish to own race horses some day, but it is Epstein who gives us a full account of this obsession. He notes that Millay kept her big-time gambling activities secret, not wanting the racing gazettes to tarnish her name as an apostle of ideal beauty.

Ever since girlhood Millay had imagined some knight in armor who would swoop in, carry her away, and be her ideal mate. Almost miraculously in April 1923, when she was down on her luck, suffering from writer's block and mysterious bodily ills, such a man appeared. She went to a party where she found herself cast together with Eugen Bossevain, a big, hearty, high-spirited Dutchman who had struck gold in America in the import business. Bossevain had been variously tried in the crucible of life. He had shot elephants in Africa, reclined on the couch of Carl Jung, and served as an assistant to the inventor Marconi. Son of a Dutch publisher, he was the widower of Inez Mulholland, once famed as a crusader for women's suffrage. He had a heroic streak and a penchant for rescuing damsels in distress—he once dived into the Seine to save a woman bent on suicide. Enthralled by Millay, Bossevain decided it was time for a rescue operation. He would throw away his fleet of merchant ships and devote his life to freeing the delicate poet from mundane care, that she might simply write.

Bossevain was a take-charge guy. On the very day of their wedding he whisked her off to a hospital where surgeons untangled a knotted lower intestine and set her back on the road to health. He purchased Steepletop, a seven-hundred-acre retreat in the Berkshires near Austerlitz, New York, and took over the running of the household: cooking, serving breakfast in bed, handling dull correspondence, even doing his ethereal wife's clothes shopping. Children were ruled out as an unnecessary distraction, and by agreement each partner would be free to sleep around. As things turned out, Millay was indeed to exploit this freedom when she met pretty-boy poet George Dillon and passionately fell for him. Bossevain urged her on, supposing that an affair with a younger man might trigger good poems.

His expectation proved accurate. While bombarding Dillon with love letters and enticing him to make visits to Steepletop, Millay churned out a spate of sonnets. These, mostly addressed to Dillon, make up a sequence of fifty-two, gathered in 1931 as *Fatal Interview*. Cash registers jingled as readers tut-tutted about this married woman who could call herself "Hell's mistress" and identify with "treacherous queens" who "took their knights to bed."

In his discussion of *Fatal Interview*, Epstein is particularly acute. He brings to it his own experience as a poet and fine craftsman. While chiding Millay for hifalutin diction and for striking queenlike poses, he nonetheless admires her as a risk-taker and thinks several of the poems sublime. As for Bossevain, he seems to have remained his wife's devout worshipper. Once, however, left behind in America while Millay and Dillon were off cohabiting in Paris, he dutifully slept with an old flame and reported this infidelity to Millay, as if to prove he was faithfully upholding his end of the open marriage.

Enabler that he was, Bossevain encouraged Millay to indulge wishes that were ultimately to bring misery to them both. When she sought relief from aches and pains, he supplied her with enough morphine to stun an ox. When her habit became a torment, Bossevain tried overdosing himself on the same drug, the better to understand what she endured. Surely his lavish provision of firewater sped her descent into alcoholism. When she would abuse the servants and provoke them to quit, Bossevain didn't complain, he merely scrounged up new ones. When she craved time with Dillon, he egged the lovers on. Inevitably, Millay found herself caught in a one-way affair, a woman losing her looks, forcing herself upon an unwilling younger man.

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She told a friend that she was totally miserable. Evidently, since her least whims were Bossevain's commands, she lacked any reason for self-denial.

Both biographers are sensitive in dealing with Millay's sad last years. In continual pain, sometimes racked with nameless terrors, dependent on drugs and alcohol, she made repeated hospital stays to treat recurrent depression. In 1940, fired up with anti-Nazi fervor, she rashly published *Make Bright the Arrows*, a collection hastily written to goad America into war. She had her doubts about it; she called it "not poems, posters." Not all of it was equally bad, but reviewers savaged it. In Epstein's account, Millay survived to write well again by 1947, after bravely kicking both the needle and the bottle.

Milford isn't so sure that Millay quite freed herself. She records the poet's continued reliance on massive doses of barbiturates, but concurs that the poems improved. Millay published no more major collections in her lifetime, but much of the work in her posthumous *Mine the Harvest* proves her ability to write with vigor of matters other than sexual love. She recalls her mother's courage; observes ordinary people, creatures, and the seasons; writes of living with pain, aging, the approach of death; even praises the formal constraints of poetry:

> I will put Chaos into fourteen lines
> And keep him there; and let him thence
> escape
> If he be lucky; let him twist, and ape
> Flood, fire, and demon—his adroit designs
> Will strain to nothing in the strict confines
> Of this sweet Order, where, in pious rape,
> I hold his essence and amorphous shape,
> Till he with Order mingles and combines.

Abruptly, her chief support fell away. Bossevain was diagnosed with lung cancer. After surgery which he dreaded only because it would interfere with his wife's work, he suffered a fatal stroke. Mustering the bravery of her early years, Millay soldiered on alone, but only a year and some weeks later died in a fall down stairs—perhaps while in a drunken stupor.

Why two new biographies at this moment? Both are based on a trove of material long held in limbo. Milford, as if to remind us that she's the biographer with the official blessing, keeps recalling her conversations with Norma, Millay's sister and sole heir, dropping them into her book along the way. Understandably, she is proud of having pried the trove loose from Norma, who had toyed with the notion of writing a biography herself, but I gather that after the sister's death it all ended up in the Library of Congress, where Epstein also had access to it.

Stressing the profundity of the trove, Milford confides that it lacked only three items which Norma destroyed: an ivory dildo, a letter from a gay male spurning Millay's advances, and a photograph of Millay and Bossevain in hardcore intimacy. At times, though, the abundance of Milford's materials—she often quotes when she might have selected—caused me to lose the thread of her story and ask, "What does all this mean?" And at such moments of helplessness I resorted to Epstein, often finding a pithy summation, such as one deftly encapsulating a journey with lover John Carter: "He even squired her to Albania." In Epstein's history, the lineaments of the plot stand out, clear and compelling. He allows only a few lines to a meaningless round-the-world trip; Milford gives us a travelogue. But you'll have to go to her for the memorable tale of Millay's second abortion (one more than Epstein is aware of), superintended by her mother, who discovered a folk remedy in a seventeenth-century herb book, brewed her daughter a potion, and had her roll about in the Dorset fields.

Milford does an admirably thorough job on Millay's family background, on the tight web of relationships with her mother and sisters. When after college she moved to Greenwich Village, Millay eventually succeeded in bringing the other three along.

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Mother Cora joined in the fun, embracing the Bohemian life and declaring (in Edmund Wilson's recollection) that "she had been a slut herself, so why shouldn't her girls be." And later, Milford gives us a droll account of Millay's one uncomfortable visit to Holland and her husband's family.

The titles of both biographies are somewhat misleading. Millay was a civilized wastrel, no savage, and it's too bad that Epstein had to subtitle his book "The Loves and Love Poems." As he plentifully shows, there's much more to Millay. The poet herself might be expected to rise in protest from her grave, for in 1948 when her publishers proposed that she gather her old love poems and write a confessional foreword, she refused. She didn't covet the kind of reader who wanted an "erotic autobiography."

Yet clearly we are in for a season of Millay gossip, as gabby as all the talk that has swirled around Sylvia Plath. Nancy Milford is to make a nine-city tour, and her biography has been excerpted in *Vanity Fair*. Movie rights, no doubt, are being hotly agented. Happily, she has also edited a *Selected Poems* for The Modern Library, due to appear along with her biography.[2] Let us hope that many who buy *Savage Beauty* looking for an erotic biography will read the poems Milford quotes and be drawn to seek out more of them.

It would be easy to stand back and view the wreckage of Millay's life, wag a finger and say, "Shouldn't the silly woman have known better?" But neither biographer indulges in moralizing. Both seem content to let Millay's follies speak for themselves, and both underscore her achievements. Approvingly, Milford cites Thomas Hardy's dictum that America had produced only two great things: the skyscraper and the poetry of Edna St. Vincent Millay. Who today would even dream of ranking the importance of any living poet next to that of the World Trade Center?

Indeed, many of the poems continue to stand impressively tall. Rereading them, I am struck by how many of them have stamped a deep dent upon my memory. It is hard to dismiss the formidable sonnets "Euclid alone has looked on Beauty bare" and "What lips my lips have kissed," "The Return" ("Earth does not understand her child"), the simple but infectious "Recuerdo" ("We were very tired, we were very merry"), "When the Year Grows Old," "Counting-out Rhyme," the almost but not quite sentimental "Ballad of the Harp-Weaver," or that pert epigram "Second Fig": "Safe upon the solid rock the ugly houses stand:/ Come and see my shining palace built upon the sand!"

From the beginning of her career, Millay seems intuitively to have accepted Ezra Pound's principle, "In poetry, only emotion endures." Writing feelingful poems, she forged a splendid plain and formal style, and with it she wrote many of the better sonnets of her century. She produced some verse that children still enjoy; she bequeathed memorable love lyrics to an American literature notably lacking in them; she wrote stageworthy plays, among them the much-produced *Aria da Capo*; she wrote the libretto for a successful opera, *The King's Henchman*. With Dillon, she translated much of Baudelaire, producing translations that compare well, in my mind, to any I know. Single-handedly, she widened the audience for poetry in America, and even if Epstein is right in thinking that the audience has now eroded, she proved lastingly that the poetry reading can, in the right hands, be good theater.

Fame, for a poet, is as hard to catch as swordfish, and spoils almost as soon. Although Millay's reputation has slumped once and may slump again when the latest spate of curiosity about her colorful life wears off, I suspect that for many of us her finest lyrics will refuse to go away. Forged with a firm control of the language, they continue to stick in the mind, to speak with a bronze bell of a voice.

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2 *Selected Poetry of Edna St. Vincent Millay*, edited by Nancy Milford; The Modern Library, 144 pages, $16.95.

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Imperishable insights

Walter Berns Making Patriots.
The University of Chicago Press,
150 pages, $20

reviewed by William F. Buckley, Jr.

This (too) short book grew out of an essay written by the distinguished political philosopher Walter Berns for *The Public Interest*. What it does is to probe into American history in search of the meaning and implications of the Declaration of Independence and its immediate progeny. Professor Berns asks: What was meant—is meant?—by our pledge of allegiance to the flag and to the Republic for which it stands? The author knows what was meant by those who coined the words and by those who fought to give the words standing in an independent country. He knows to declare our republic unique. Walter Berns can be pretty assertive in expressing his own views but to say that much about America calls for a little rhetorical caution, so he lets Thomas Pangle say it:

> The declaration by which Americans made themselves independent marked the birth of the first nation in history grounded explicitly not on tradition, or loyalty to tradition, but on an appeal to abstract and universal and philosophical principles of political right.

Therein hangs the story. There are problems in forwarding this view of the flag for three reasons. One, we don't know *how* to foster a belief in American principles among our children. This is so because the schools do not, under pain of violating academic freedom, feel free to inculcate a respect for American values. Two, we have been taught that our values are enduring only insofar as they are revalidated year after year by democratic procedures; which is to say, if they fall into disfavor, then the postulates of the American revolution are no longer enviable. And three, the American flag is something anyone who wishes is at liberty to burn. The Supreme Court said so, to be sure by the narrowest margin, but it is now accepted that burning the flag is a form of speech, therefore, to be safeguarded by the courts pursuant to our pledge, by whatever is the surviving altar, to defend the Bill of Rights.

Prof. Berns tells us that the Founders had no doubts about the principles they asserted. However bizarre, it is true that the *revolution* they engaged in continues a sacred right. Not so infidelity to government laws. On Prof. Berns's reading, the State of South Carolina had no right to defy the union, having become a constituent part of it. It would have had the right, by the constitutional canon, to *rebel* against the strictures of the United States government, but this right the Civil Warriors did not claim, claiming instead a right to dissociate from the union. In resisting this, President Lincoln was, correctly, defending a contract.

But the preservation of an America guided by the principles of the Declaration required ongoing generations of virtuous citizens. How was this to be brought about? Everyone who spoke out on the subject after the war acknowledged that the job of inculcating good citizenship—of making patriots—was an educational enterprise. But the word "education" does not exist in the Constitution, and occurs only once in the Federalist Papers. I am reminded of Alfred North Whitehead's observation that that which is *not* mentioned in the idiom of a period is that which is truly singular. The Founders did not speak of the responsibility of the state to inculcate virtue because they took it for granted that the state (read the states) would do so, and indeed the McGuffey Readers alone, we learn from Prof. Berns, were responsible for attitudes about America and about obligations to America in as many as one-half of our schoolchildren.

The obligation to educate in virtue was primarily that of parents: derivatively, of the schools they founded and governed. And the responsibility, also, of religion, almost universally acknowledged as the fountain-

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head of those values the Constitution, *pace* its toleration of slavery, sought to enshrine. A key here was the formal separation of church and state, which removed any temptation to co-opt the government for catechistic duties. That separation of church and state having been assured, the states were left to encourage religion and to benefit from its teachings.

What happened was the advent of American self-doubt. This was explicitly licensed by Oliver Wendell Holmes. Prof. Berns quotes his language, "If, in the long run, the beliefs expressed in proletarian dictatorship are destined to be accepted by the dominant forces of the community, the only meaning of free speech is that they should be given their chance and have their way." Hugo Black compressed that to: "The only meaning of free speech must be that revolutionary ideas will be allowed to prevail."

"Accordingly," Prof. Berns observes,

> while Americans, out of habit, might continue to "pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands," the Republic itself stands for nothing in particular, which means that the flag stands for nothing in particular. This, of course, was not the view of those who designed it.

One can see Prof. Berns biting his lip to say it softly: "For them the flag, and its ceremonies, was one of the means of promoting patriotism."[1]

By the year 1991, this philosophical nescience had crept into legislation.

> In 1991 the state of Florida enacted a statute requiring its public schools to teach that no "culture is intrinsically superior or inferior to another," which is a way of saying to its more recent immigrants that they might just as well have stayed in Cuba or Haiti, as if there is nothing to choose between Castro's dictatorship and constitutional democracy, or Haitian voodooism and the biblical religions.

I don't think that Prof. Berns really makes his case, i.e., teaches us how to make patriots. To begin with, I fear that he—and Abraham Lincoln—takes it too much for granted that the discharge of military duty, whether in peace or war, is an expression of patriotism. It is certainly that for many soldiers and sailors and even draftees. But it is also simple submission to the laws. (It is sobering to note the valor shown by the Russian and German military in defending their hideous governments.) There is an anthropomorphization of the ideals Berns cherishes, and he gives it to us in a chapter on Abraham Lincoln, whom he nicely designates as "Patriotism's Poet." Lincoln voiced ideals higher than those that moved the typical Union soldier. What he accomplished was to give those who survived, and those who were left to mourn the dead, a sense of the nobility of the enterprise.

To make a patriot is to cultivate, as Prof. Berns instructs us, the virtues that lead to patriotism: the love of country, of its institutions, and of the insights of the Founders, which insights Walter Berns postulates as true and as imperishable as Mr. Lincoln suggested hopefully at Gettysburg they might be.

Golden spark, little saint

Hannah Green Little Saint.
Random House, 352 pages, $24.95

reviewed by William Jay Smith

Although she had been writing and publishing for more than forty years, Hannah

1 I like it better when Professor Berns discharges 200-proof scorn. In a footnote he quotes Justice Wiley B. Rutledge from *Everson* v. *Board of Education* disallowing public transportation for parochial school children. "[The purpose of the First Amendment]," said Justice Rutledge, "was to create a complete and permanent separation of the spheres of religious activity and civil authority by comprehensively forbidding every form of public aid or support for religion." Berns: "No one with any knowledge of our history could have written this."

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Green left behind her an extremely small body of work when she died in 1996 shortly before her seventieth birthday. In addition to a few short stories and one children's book, it consists of a novel, *The Dead of the House*, and *Little Saint*, which her publisher has aptly called "part celebration, part biography, part prayer, as well as an ode to joy, life, death, and the transcendent." It centers around the life and legend of Saint Foy, a twelve-year-old girl martyred in 303, and the village of Conques in the south of France, where her bones, enshrined, constitute the "golden spark" that drew pilgrims to it for centuries and that still animates the life of its present inhabitants.

Hannah Green grew up in Glendale, near Cincinnati, Ohio, and spent her summers in northern Michigan on the Old Mission Peninsula of Grand Traverse Bay. *The Dead of the House*, a moving evocation of her childhood in those places, found many delighted readers when it was published by Doubleday in 1972. Thomas Lask called it "a delicate and lovely novel, a work of recovery—something to shore the spirit against the ruins," and Richard Ellmann said that reading it was like falling in love: "I was, for as long as it took, able to surrender my own callousness and smugness to the ecstasy that is fiction, that is art." When Jeannette Watson of Books and Co., New York's once preeminent bookstore, and Jonathan Rabinowitz of Turtle Point Press, a small literary press specializing in valuable forgotten fiction, decided to launch a joint imprint, both made lists of the ten books they wanted most to see revived. *The Dead of the House* was at the top of each list. Their new edition appeared in 1995.

In *Little Saint*, to which she devoted the last twenty years of her life, Hannah Green explains that she and her husband, the painter John Wesley, like her a Protestant and "a stranger to saints," traveled in the spring of 1975 to Conques in the southern French mountains of the Rouergue. In this remote and ancient place of pilgrimage, she was given through Saint Foy "the gift of seeing into that zone which has been held sacred since the beginning of human consciousness." Almost at once she began to set down a record of this gift and of the place that offered it.

When one of the villagers guesses that she plans to make him a character in her book, she says that he had understood in a flash of intuitive perception that

> what I was writing was in no sense detached history or art history or hagiography or a romance set in the Middle Ages, but something more like a novel, a literary work, drawing on details that, I hoped, would bring present-day Conques to life as the work revolved around its mysterious central presence: Saint Foy.

Hannah Green was not the first writer to visit this secluded village and to fall under its spell. Prosper Mérimée (1803–1870) visited it in 1836 as Inspector General of Historical Monuments and was appalled by the state into which one of the most beautiful Romanesque churches in France had fallen after the Revolution. It is thanks to him that we owe its restoration.

Saint Foy, or Fides ("Faith"), clearly lived up to her name. She was born in 290 at Agen, in southwestern France. Less than thirteen years later, when she refused to renounce her Christian faith, she was betrayed by her own father, roasted on a brazen bed, and finally beheaded. In 866, during the Norman invasion, her bones, which had been carefully guarded for four-hundred years in a church above Agen, were transferred to Conques. There her reliquary statue, richly embellished by gold and precious stones during the Middle Ages, made the village one of the principal stops for pilgrims on the way to St. James of Compostela in Spain. For three-hundred years, during the religious wars, the treasure lay buried beneath the stones of the church. When the Germans came in World War II, it was again hidden. Count von Metternich saved it by reporting to Hitler that the treasure had so deteriorated that it was not worth bothering about.

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St. Foy had a wide following in France, to which numerous place names and churches today attest. Her fame spread also to Italy and Spain and eventually to South America. Twenty-three ancient English churches are consecrated to her, and, in London, Westminster Abbey and St. Paul's Cathedral both contain St. Faith chapels. But Conques was, and remains, the sacred center, around which the wheel of her story "with its thousand starry spokes" turns.

Conques (the name derives from the Latin *concha*, conch shell or shell-like vessel, in this case, a deep and sheltered place in the mountains) is a town of fewer than two-hundred year-round inhabitants, but hundreds of tourists come every summer to gaze on its famous statue. The little figure, less than three feet high, has a head much larger than its thin body. The head, dating probably from the fourth century, is thought to have been that of a late laurel-crowned Roman Emperor and is made of gold repoussé laid over with gold leaf. Some viewers today find in the figure's rigidity and in its sombre fixed gaze something of the mystery and solemnity of certain Egyptian statues.

> "*Pas beau*," a young child is heard to exclaim.
> "*Barbare*," a well-dressed Frenchman intones.
> "Hideous," says an indignant English woman.

But Hannah Green felt that Saint Foy imbues the antique head with her own grace and trancelike power and gives it a truly generative artistic force. She senses in it and in the young girl it represents the kind of energy that Henry Adams felt generated by the Virgin Mary, an energy that culminated in the construction of the Cathedral of Chartres in the twelfth century. Green's book is a prayer and a meditation addressed to Saint Foy and a celebration of that energy. It is at the same time, for her and for the Conquois, a celebration of the simple joy of living, which that energy appears to sanction.

Hannah Green was a runner. She started jogging daily long before it became wise or fashionable to do so. When she entered a room, smiling, bright-eyed and breathless, as if just back from a sprint, she seemed to harbor some delightful secret that she was about to reveal. Her writing has the same quality of breathlessness. *Little Saint* is a breathless book, told nonstop, as if in a trance. Within a twenty-four-hour frame of the town's life, it is told as stories were once told by bards or storytellers around campfires, all in one sentence as it were, in a circular pattern with constant digressions, a continuing thread, yet seamless in the fabric its intensity creates. She tells her tale as a child might, so filled with excitement that she cannot stop for fear of losing one particle of all the wonder she sets out to reveal.

On her first visit to Conques, she had laid aside the manuscripts of her "College Days" and "Dreams and Early Memories," on which she had been working, to put down these lines in the notebook she always carried in a little deerskin Indian bag:

> My head sets off in longing, ready for this pilgrimage. The sense of hundreds of years, thousands of pilgrims, footsteps and miles and miles of land, of mountains, of rivers crossed, all with an object—that golden statue, and in it the bones of that young girl who perished centuries before, who perished for her faith, for her pure courage.

But perhaps she did not really lay aside the record of these early dreams and the memories of childhood days in Michigan with the clear summer light of Grand Traverse Bay; she simply reinforced and enlarged them. In her vision she was not just following in the footsteps of all those thousands of pilgrims over the centuries; she was also seeking something deep within herself. Saint Foy, "eternal girl-child, daughter becoming woman, who held the promise of all that is good and beautiful and healing," became for her, buried within her consciousness, the symbol of her own lost innocence. And her pilgrimage, set forth here with such resonance, is the record of the

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recovery, in a distant foreign place, of that innocence, a pilgrimage on which she was joined and ably assisted by her husband.

In Wesley's visionary, odd, and funny Pop Art paintings, off-key colors dominate, and under the ironic flat presentation of comic-strip characters there is a sad childlike search. Of his paintings showing Blondie and Dagwood in an empty house he said: "It is really my house when I was little. Those lamps, those curtains, that chair, they were my house then. It is really my father I am looking for. My father was like Bumstead. He was thin like Bumstead, and he wore a tie to work and when he came home from work he tipped his hat to the neighbors." As a small child, Wesley found his father dead from a heart attack, his feet protruding from the bathroom door. After this death, his mother sent him for a while to an orphanage. In his painting "Dagwood Wave Dancers," Wesley seems to have revived his father in a series of Dagwoods dancing happily along on Hokusai waves.

If Conques captivated the writer and the painter, the village was equally captivated by them. For two decades the curly-dark-haired Hannah—"Madame Anna"—and the broad-shouldered fair-haired Jack—*le grand Jack*—were known and loved by everyone. Their acceptance was in itself remarkable because the Aveyronese are a tough and difficult people who have remained conquered and poor but rich in the language and culture that they fought, against all odds, to retain. If with them you take a wrong step, wrong in any way, you are finished, but *les Américains*, in this case, did everything right from the beginning. As a result, the villagers opened their hearts and revealed their innermost secrets.

Paul Klee said once that he wanted to paint like a child but like a wise child. Hannah and Jack in this book come off as wise-childlike observers in a fairytale landscape, a town that was literally a conch, a resonant shell that echoed with the river flowing beneath it and where everything on the hillside was somehow askew and when you entered a house by the attic, you came out through the cellar.

Hannah Green, with a far-seeing innocent but probing gaze, gives us, as Dylan Thomas did in *Under Milkwood*, a lyrical, moving, and at times hilarious evocation of an entire community. "Through our own recovered innocence," Thoreau writes in *Walden*, "we discover the innocence of our neighbors." And the Conquois neighbors are all here, emerging in an innocent distillation as if from the conch itself, to dance before our eyes on Hokusai waves—from the saintly learned Père André, who guards the treasure of Saint Foy, to old Monsieur Rémy Montourcy, who is known to one and all as "the Devil." Erect, gruff, proud, his face aglow from drink, and smelling frequently of urine, he walks up and down the rue Charlemagne four times a day. He is called "the Devil" not because he is evil in any way, but because his father for years before the turn of the century had played the part of the Devil in a village passion play.

At Wellesley, Hannah Green was a philosophy major, but writing was always her central concern. In retrospect she felt that the most important course she took was a survey of Russian literature in translation with Vladimir Nabokov. She described its profound effect on her in an article, "Mister Nabokov" in 1977 in *The New Yorker*. When one of the villagers discovers that like so many others he is going to have a place in her book, he tells her, sounding, she says, like Mister Nabokov: "It is the details, the divine details that make a work of literature." And it is indeed the divine details of *Little Saint* that make it memorable. The author tells us how the villagers look, how they talk, how they walk, how they smell. She salutes Rosalie's voice that "comes from the generations of pretty girls watching their sheep or their cows on one mountain while they carried on a charming conversation with the cowherd or the shepherd on the mountain across the valley." She takes us to Rosalie's magic garden suspended on a ledge over the town, and seats us at her kitchen table, where we taste with her a

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salad made with the rich walnut oil from her husband Charlou's walnut groves and the red wine vinegar from a huge earthen jar behind her woodstove in which she keeps, as an uncle had advised her to, a stick of elderberry bush. In this apple-scented valley where the scalloped stones of the roofs in the evening take on "a sheen like dragonfly wings," her keen reverent eye misses nothing. The purity of her feeling allows her to set down the legendary life of Saint Foy, however improbable its nature, and the lives of the villagers, all part in their way even now of the polychrome tympanum of the church, which must be viewed, she says, "in time, with eternity shining through." Like the villagers, her reader also becomes part of the picture as she describes the manuscript pages of the book as "rumpled and curled" as they accumulate on her table:

> They have been written in ink and then typed and written over with ink. I cross out, compress, correct, add things, and think of more things and note them, and type it all up again, over and over, often thinking of something more as I type.

Hannah Green continued in this fashion for twenty years until she had gathered what she saw as a three-volume work. She still seemed unwilling to let go of it, and her friends began to wonder if she ever would. Cancer forced her to compress the whole into this single volume that reached her publisher months after her death. It reads as if it had been written non-stop, in a state of rapture, at a single sitting, just as she had hoped it would.

When she first came to Conques, Hannah Green said that reading French was still for her "like trying to make things out through thick mist." Her exact translation of the many complex French texts throughout the book show that the mist had definitely cleared. She would therefore be acutely unhappy to find the French as presented here studded throughout with misplaced accents, misspellings, and grammatical errors—the single flaw in the perfection for which she strove and one that it is hoped will be corrected in future editions of his powerful and unforgettable book.

The muddle set straight

Elie Kedourie
In the Anglo-Arab Labyrinth:
The McMahon-Husayn Correspondence and Its Interpretations, 1914–1939.
Frank Cass, 350 pages, $28.50 paper

reviewed by Alain Silvera

This book was originally published by Cambridge University Press in 1976. It was immediately hailed as a model of historical scholarship and remains the most careful and judicious study ever written of the genesis of Britain's troubled relations with the Arabs. Drawing on the evidence contained in recently released archives from the Foreign Office, Kedourie was able to refine the indictment of the failures of British policy in the Middle East he had already put forward in such works as *England and the Middle East: The Destruction of the Ottoman Empire, 1914–1921* (1956) and *The Chatham House Version and Other Essays* (1970).

The Labyrinth has two parts. The first, called "The Quicksand," borrows its title from a minute in which the Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, gave vent to his exasperation over the hornet's nest of conflicting pledges: "This Arab question is a regular quicksand." Kedourie explored in detail the character and extent of the commitments made by the British government to the Arabs in order to induce them to take up arms against the Turks during the First World War. The second part of the book is called "The Fly in the Fly Bottle," after a celebrated passage in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. Here Kedourie conducted a ruthless examination of the official historiography from the time of the frenzied deliberations generated by the peace negotiations at Versailles—when the British cab-

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inet had not one but two foreign secretaries to watch over its far-flung interests—to the White Paper of 1939, which by restricting Jewish immigration to Palestine was deliberately designed to appease the Arabs as a way to atone for British errors in the past.

The second part of the book is a dazzling academic exercise. Kedourie scrutinizes every scrap of documentary evidence culled from the minutes, précis, and memoranda scattered in the Foreign Office records, laying bare an appalling record of ignorance and wishful thinking within the ranks of Britain's foreign policy establishment. The folly he describes ranged all the way from the lofty pronouncements of the mandarins in Chatham House—Britain's counterpart to the American Council of Foreign Relations—to the minutes scribbled by all those lowly officials in Whitehall who felt compelled to put pen to paper on the subject of Anglo-Arab relations. Displaying an enviable command of the sources, Kedourie shows how a succession of junior officials, acting from a mixture of guilt, anti-Semitism, and sheer ineptitude were able to create and perpetuate the legend that Britain had betrayed the cause of its wartime Arab allies. This legend had fateful consequences on the conduct of British policy in the region between the wars. By twisting the meaning of documents entrusted to their care, such openly partisan civil servants as Harold Nicolson and Arnold Toynbee, but most notably George Rendel, head of the Foreign Office's Eastern Department, conducted a vigorous campaign to convince their hierarchical superiors that British policy, especially with regard to Palestine, was out of step with pledges solemnly undertaken by their predecessors in the course of the war.

The foundation document of these pledges was to be found in the so-called McMahon-Husayn correspondence, letters and supplementary notes exchanged from the fall of 1914 to January 1916 by Sharif Husayn of Mecca and Sir Henry McMahon, newly appointed from India to replace Kitchener as Britain's High Commissioner in Egypt. The first approach was, in fact, made by Husayn before there was any prospect of an Anglo-Turkish conflict. Fearing deposition by his Ottoman sovereign, the sharif contacted Kitchener through one of his sons in view to securing British arms and support to maintain his precarious autonomy against both the sultan and such rival tribes as the Saudis, who were already being subsidized by the British government in India. Kitchener returned a correct but negative reply. The outbreak of the war and McMahon's arrival in Cairo, however, revived interest in winning Arab sympathies and in resuming talks with a possible ally. The ensuing correspondance, couched in deliberately vague and ambiguous terms and largely conducted on the British side by such Arabists as Ronald Storrs, the Oriental Secretary in Cairo, held out the hope that much of the Ottoman Empire's Arab territory might fall under Sharifian rule if the Arabs cast in their lot with the Entente powers and rose against the Turks. No effective action was ever taken by Husayn, who was not even able to capture the neighboring city of Medina. And the French, who had great say in the disposal of such territory, were never consulted.

This promise, in the Arab view, was broken at the end of hostilities. In defiance of President Wilson's proclamation that the war had been waged to make the world safe for democracy, McMahon's pledges were set aside in favor of a veiled form of colonialism whereby the Arab portions of the defunct Turkish empire were placed under Anglo-French control with a mandate from the League of Nations. Husayn and his sons paraded their grievances at the peace conference, alleging a breach of faith on the part of their British patrons. Another example of British perfidy, they contended, was the Sykes-Picot Agreement of April 1916 in which the British joined the French in carving up the Middle East into spheres of influence in accordance with their own political and strategic interests.

Arab recriminations against such broken

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pledges and double-dealing remain alive to the present day. They were repeatedly heard during the Gulf War with all its rhetoric about "lines in the sand" that were said to stand in the way of Arab aspirations for national unity. And they were echoed, for instance, by King Hussein of Jordan, the great-great-grandson of the Sharif of Mecca, when he declared that "the real purpose behind this destructive war . . . is to destroy Iraq and rearrange the area in a manner far more dangerous to our nation's present and future than the Sykes-Picot Agreement."

Kedourie's earlier writings had already discredited this version of events, which rests on the dubious proposition that the Arab world's predicament should be traced to the intrusion of the West and the duplicity of European imperialists. But *The Labyrinth* goes one step further by demonstrating that the Arabs' indignation against perfidious Albion and, even more significantly, Britain's sense of remorse and misgivings for having somehow let the Arabs down, are flatly contradicted by the weight of the evidence.

On the vexed question of the relation between the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the McMahon-Husayn correspondence, Kedourie presents a comprehensive exploration of the different conditions and changing circumstances under which these two undertakings were reached and later modified or discarded. The clarity of Kedourie's account allows the reader to draw his own conclusions on the respective merits of the Anglo-Arab dispute. On the controversial question of whether the provisions of Sykes-Picot were ever disclosed to Husayn, for instance, he demonstrates conclusively not only that Sykes-Picot took the McMahon pledges into account but also that the sharif was informed on at least two separate occasions of the extent of French territorial claims and declared himself to be not unduly perturbed by their demands.

The evidence also confirms, however, that Britain's role as the imbroglio with the Sharifians began to unfold was by no means beyond reproach. Consider Kitchener, who had been ordered to relinquish his post in Egypt to become the Secretary of War in Asquith's cabinet. In October 1914, on the very day Britain declared war on Turkey, he took the first step in arousing Husayn's ambitions by dangling the bait of the Caliphate as a way to forestall the impact that the sultan's imminent proclamation of jihad would have on Britain's Muslim subjects in India.

There has been considerable debate about the ambiguous wording of Kitchener's message. Despite their long experience on the spot, both Kitchener and the officials in Cairo seemed to have conceived the Caliphate as designating a sort of spiritual leadership divorced from political power, something along the lines of the papacy in the West. The sharif, driven only by political ambition and a desire to expand the prestige of his Hashemite clan in the rest of the Arab world, was emboldened by the British initiative to put forward his claim to a title that had traditionally designated temporal dominion in the Islamic world. As transmitted by Storrs in the high-flown language he liked to affect on such occasions, the letter had the effect of conjuring up wide-ranging possibilities for the future. "It may be that an Arab of true race will assume the Caliphate of Mecca or Medina and so good may come, by the help of God, out of all the evil which is now occurring."

Then again, at a critical juncture in the exchange of letters, during September of the following year, Lieutenant Muhammad Sharif al-Faruki's fanciful revelations about the enormous power wielded by the shadowy Arab secret societies operating behind enemy lines in Syria and Mesopotamia produced an even more drastic shift in British overtures to Husayn. Faruki was a very junior Arab officer from Mosul who had deserted from the Ottoman army in Gallipoli. Nevertheless he appears to have had little trouble in persuading his British interrogator in Cairo—no less a figure than Gilbert Clayton, the director of military intelligence—that the sharif's claim to represent the Arabs rested on a vast and powerful nationalist movement that stood ready to

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lend its strength to an Arab revolt. Faruki was quite unknown to Husayn, but these fantasies were accepted at face value by the British and would have far-reaching consequences in shaping their reactions to Sharifian demands. Reservations about the sharif were expressed by the Foreign Office and even more forcefully by the Secretary of State for India, Austen Chamberlain, who dismissed him as "a nonentity." But Clayton's gullibility gave new impetus to the view widely held in Cairo that Husayn was a leader of national stature with a large following among Arab officers serving in the Ottoman forces.

It was such faulty intelligence that persuaded the High Commissioner to send off his letter of October 24, containing the most generous terms that the British had ever been willing to concede to the Sharifian side. This was the famous and controversial letter in which Storrs, inspired perhaps by a passage he had come across in Gibbon, laid down the now-familiar chain of "Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, and Hama" as marking the boundaries of some future Arab state. In chapter 58 of *Decline and Fall*, Gibbon had referred to this particular conjunction of place names as defining the limits of the area left in Muslim hands after the First Crusade had swept through most of Syria and Lebanon to establish the Latin kingdoms of the Levant. McMahon went to great lengths, however, to exclude any areas where the French might have prior claims, which at that time meant both Syria and Palestine. It is clear from the evidence collected by Kedourie that Husayn's real concern was to be recognized as "King of the Arabs," or better still as caliph, and territorial claims only occurred to him later when his higher ambitions seemed likely to be frustrated.

The men on the spot in Cairo—Ronald Storrs, the fastidious man of letters whose command of Arabic left much to be desired; Reginald Wingate, the governor-general of the Sudan and Sirdar ("commander-in-chief") of the Egyptian army—who succeeded McMahon as British High Commissioner before the end of the war—and Gilbert Clayton, the blundering spymaster who failed to see that Arab nationalism was, in fact, a nationalism without nationalists; as well as that colorful band of Arabists brought together by the Oxford archaeologist David Hogarth in the Arab Bureau—do not emerge unscathed from Kedourie's brisk and lively account. He is careful to emphasize, however, that the McMahon-Husayn correspondence never reached the point of becoming a binding document. It was conceived by both sides as the basis for future negotiations to be resumed during the postwar settlement. Hastily and carelessly drafted under considerable stress, they were designed to devise a formula that would be mutually acceptable to both parties, but were never meant to constitute a treaty in any legal sense. The question of Palestine was never contemplated nor even mentioned. The correspondence can only be interpreted as a provisional wartime agreement between two unequal partners laying down declarations of intent regarding future policy that would inevitably be contingent on changing circumstances and the interests of other possible claimants to the Ottoman legacy, whether Greeks or Zionists, Kurds or Armenians. Nor was McMahon in any position to sign a formal alliance with the Sharifians along the lines of the treaty relations that the British government in India had established with Ibn Saud of Najd—who in 1924 was to overthrow the Sharifs of Mecca—the Emir of Kuwait, and the other rulers of the Gulf emirates.

Perhaps the most revealing commentary on how the weaker party remained capable of exploiting its weakness in order to extract concessions from the stronger party even under such adverse conditions can be illustrated by the statement made by the twenty-one-year-old Faruki, soon to become Husayn's official representative in Cairo, following his debriefing on October 11, 1915. As reported by Clayton, Faruki declared: "Our scheme embraces all the Arab coun-

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tries including Syria and Mesopotamia, but if we cannot have it all, we want as much as we can get." The French, who played no part in these negotiations, were more realistic than their British counterparts in their dealings with the Arabs. They rejected all of Husayn's claims as outrageous and dismissed the pan-Arab movement conjured up by Faruki as a sham and a delusion fabricated by the British officials in Cairo as part of a conspiracy "to biff the French out of all hope of Syria," as T. E. Lawrence, a member of the Arab Bureau, was to put it.

McMahon emerges as a confused and ineffective Indian civil servant who found himself completely out of his depth when confronted by the wiles and stratagems of Husayn and his sons. Knowing neither French nor Arabic, he felt increasingly helpless. He desperately cast about for a way to reconcile all the conflicting pledges made in the name of His Majesty's Government by the Indian Government—which was pursuing its own traditional interests in Iraq, the Persian Gulf, and most of Arabia—the Colonial and Foreign Offices, often acting at cross purposes, and a formidable but secretive Secretary of War who continued to exert enormous influence on Arab affairs through his personal agent, Mark Sykes. In fact, among all the protagonists of this story, it was Sykes who made the largest single contribution to shaping the destiny of the modern Middle East.

Handpicked by Kitchener to serve as his understudy in Egypt, McMahon relied entirely on Storrs to help him find the elusive Ariadne who would rescue him from the labyrinth. At one point, in April 1916, overwhelmed by the contradictory advice on the Arab question he was receiving from so many different quarters, he confided in a private letter to the Foreign Secretary, "I feel at times somewhat bewildered at the numerous agencies who have a hand in it." In India, McMahon is chiefly remembered for having drawn the McMahon line in 1913 to keep the peace between India and China. The border was never recognized by China, either before or after Mao, and produced a war between India and China in 1962. Kedourie's account of McMahon's efforts to grapple with the Arab problem shows that he was capable of creating an even greater muddle in the Middle East. But it is not McMahon's shortcomings, but the self-accusing sophistries of those who championed his efforts which are the real target of this devastating book.

March to the scaffold

Michael Rudick, editor
The Poems of Sir Walter Ralegh:
A Historical Edition.
The Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 239 pages, $25

reviewed by Paul Dean

This radically revisionist edition, as Michael Rudick himself admits, would scarcely have been possible without the pioneering work of Arthur F. Marotti, whose *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric* (1995) first made the case for the importance of "scribal publication" to the textual bibliographer. Marotti showed that medieval practices of manuscript circulation had continued unbroken long after printed books became widely available—indeed, well into the Restoration period—and argued that the surviving compilations, whether in private notebooks or more formal anthologies with a coterie readership, were neglected witnesses to the sociohistorical context and reception history of an extensive body of lyric poetry. Before Marotti's work, editors had largely neglected scribal publication because, as they saw it, the texts involved were unreliable both in terms of readings and in attribution, furnishing evidence more of the construction of a poet's image, and the interests of readers, than of what the poet might actually have written and intended. Michael Rudick argues not just that such evidence is important to our understanding of Sir Walter Ralegh's poetry, but that, with

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a few exceptions, it is the only kind of evidence we have.

Ralegh (1554–1618) is a prime example of the poet as gentleman amateur. After a conventional education at Oxford and the Inns of Court, he began his maritime adventures at the age of twenty-four, captaining a ship in an unsuccessful expedition to discover the Northwest Passage. Thereafter he pursued multiple careers as diplomat, member of parliament, courtier, landowner, soldier, and explorer. He served in the anti-Armada fleet in 1588 and the same year made the error of marrying without the queen's *knowledge or consent. When Elizabeth* learnt of the marriage, an astonishing four years later, both Ralegh and his wife were temporarily imprisoned. He managed to climb back into the royal favor—resuming his parliamentary duties and undertaking further voyages—only to find himself falsely charged with high treason on the accession of King James in 1603. He was found guilty, but his death sentence was commuted, and he spent the next thirteen years in prison in the Tower of London, conducting scientific experiments and writing his grandly somber prose work, *The History of the World* (1614). He was released in 1616 to lead an expedition against Guiana, which proved such a failure that, on his return home, the death sentence of 1603 was revived. He was executed in 1618 at the age of sixty-four.

Any poetry which emerged from such a turbulent career was bound to be occasional, topical, and controversial, and so it proves. During Ralegh's lifetime only a handful of pieces were printed, including four commendatory poems in friends' books and the translations from classical poetry in *The History of the World*. There are only five items, addressed to Queen Elizabeth in her persona as Cynthia the moon-goddess, in the poet's own hand. There is, however, no one authoritative manuscript or printed source to help us determine the Ralegh canon. Many attributions are dubious, or clearly false, aimed at discrediting him; many, too, date from long after his death. Rudick's solution is to print poems in chronological order of their first ascription to Ralegh, whether in manuscript or printed form, between 1576 and 1618; he appends a checklist of posthumous attributions extending well into the seventeenth century. I will refer only to poems which are certainly by Ralegh or which can be assigned to him on good evidence.

Ralegh is, among other things, a fine poet of disappointment. In "The 21st and Last Book of the Ocean to Cynthia," written circa 1592 as an act of reparation to the queen for his secret marriage, he can shape the regular iambics into something more *biting and pointed:*[1]

> From fruitful trees I gather withered leaves
> And glean the broken ears with miser's hands,
> Who sometime did enjoy the weighty sheaves.
> I seek fair flowers amid the brinish sand.

Yet he could be more outspoken than this, as in "The Lie":

> Say to the Court, it glows
> And shines like rotten wood.
> Say to the Church, it shows
> What's good, but doth no good:
> If Court and Church reply,
> Give Court and Church the lie.

The barely contained rage which spits out the first two lines of this passage is remarkable. Notable in another way is the weary despondency of "Farewell to the Court": "Like truthless dreams, so are my joys expired,/ And past return are all my dandled days" "Dandled," with its suggestion of the cosseted child, is a marvelously surprising word.

In those days, Ralegh, like many another courtier, thought of poetry as a form of amorous dalliance and wrote some forgettable pastorals and pretty complimentary lyrics. He even addressed Elizabeth I in conventional plaintive terms ("Fortune hath

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1 Rudick follows his copy-texts for spelling and punctuation. I have modernized both for the convenience of the reader.

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taken thee away, my love," where "Fortune" may be a coded reference to the Earl of Essex), which prompted her to reply: "Ah, silly pug, wert thou so sore afraid?/ Mourn not, my Wat, nor be thou so dismayed."

The tone of affectionate teasing must have echoed hollowly in Ralegh's prison cell. "The less afraid," the queen's poem concluded, "the better shalt thou speed." This exchange may have suggested the anecdote, first found in Thomas Fuller's *Worthies of England* (1622), that Ralegh scratched onto a window the words "Fain would I climb, yet fear I to fall," to which Elizabeth wrote in reply, "If thy heart fails thee, climb not at all." It is all very well to say such things, when you are a monarch: knowing how to respond, when you are a subject, is more tricky.

If fall from grace was one wellspring of Ralegh's poetry, impending death was another. "What is our life?," one of his most celebrated poems, exists in some seventy manuscripts, with considerable textual variations, and was set to music unforgettably by Orlando Gibbons. The most authentic version, Rudick concludes, is this:

> What is our life? A play of passion.
> What is our mirth? The music of division.
> Our mothers, they the tiring-houses
> [dressing rooms] be,
> Where we are dressed for time's short tragedy.
> Earth is the stage, Heaven the spectator is,
> Who doth behold who here doth act amiss.
> The graves which keep us from the parching
> sun
> Are as drawn curtains till the play be done.

This is not quite as trenchant as the version used by Gibbons, in which "Our mothers, they" becomes "Our mothers' wombs," and "time's short tragedy," "this short comedy," after which the text reads:

> Heaven the judicious sharp spectator is
> That sits and marks still who doth act amiss.
> Our graves that hide us from the searching sun
> Are like drawn curtains when the play is done.
> Thus march we, playing, to our latest rest:
> Only we die in earnest—that's no jest.

Gibbons gives "Thus march we, playing" a macabre briskness every bit as terrifying as the "March to the Scaffold" in Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*. Whoever made these alterations and additions knew what they were doing. Still further versions have "scorching sun," "Thus, playing, post we" or "run we," and a weaker ending, "And then we die in earnest, not in jest." These details illustrate the complexities with which Rudick has to deal: none can be shown to derive authoritatively from Ralegh, yet, since all appeared in his lifetime, none can definitely be assigned to someone else.

"Enough poems have been ascribed to Ralegh on the night before he died," Rudick drily observes, "to have kept him versifying without pause." Among these are "The Lie," "What is our life?," and the poem beginning "Give me my scallop shell of quiet," which is of doubtful authenticity. The best candidate for the position of Ralegh's poetic testament is this moving little piece:

> Even such is Time, which takes in trust
> Our youth, our joys, and all we have,
> And pays us but with age and dust;
> Who, in the dark and silent grave,
> When we have wandered all our ways,
> Shuts up the story of our days:
> And from which earth and grave and dust
> The Lord shall raise me up, I trust.

The switch from quatrain to couplets gives an impression of inevitable foreclosure. Again there are significant variants in another text, including "pays us back" for "pays us but" and the stronger conclusion, "But from Time's rage, the grave, and dust,/ My God shall raise me up, I trust," which mimics the gradual reassembling of the resurrected body and adds a more intimate note of piety by substituting "My God" for "The Lord."

The once standard view of Ralegh as an atheist and president of the mythical "School of Night" alluded to in *Love's Lab-*

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our's Lost is by now, one hopes, entirely discredited, but if not it will be decisively extinguished by this stimulating, though theoretically austere, edition. The smear tactics of Ralegh's enemies fail before the evidence of the poems. Misfortune gave him an increasingly personal voice, which, even if minor, possesses haunting sonorities. He was ultimately called upon to lay down more than his cloak for his sovereign.

Roar of the greasepaint

Roger Flury Pietro Mascagni: A Bio-Bibliography. Greenwood Publishing Group, 440 pages, $90

reviewed by R. J. Stove

To be a one-hit wonder is painful enough; to have posterity forever yoke one's hit with the hit of another one-hit wonder suggests a torment straight out of Dante. Such, in brief, was the fate of Pietro Mascagni (1863–1945). Not only did his *Cavalleria Rusticana* (1888, premiered 1890) make him world-famous before he had turned twenty-eight, it also proved—after two misleading years of independent existence—unthinkable in the public mind save as part of a double-bill with *Pagliacci* (1892) by Mascagni's rival Ruggiero Leoncavallo (1857–1919). Known to opera-lovers as "*Cav* and *Pag*" (or, more archly, "the heavenly twins"), both masterpieces found their way into Ogden Nash's verse as an emblem for the umbilically conjoined:

> Mr. Powers began to shave only once a week
> because no one cared whether his chin was
> scratchy.
> He felt as lonely as *Cavalleria* without
> *Pagliacci*.

Mascagni's future was five decades of frustrating efforts to convince the world that he had not shot his bolt after one great commercial triumph. Only with the comedic (rather than comic) opera *L'Amico Fritz* did he again come close to international success, and even this approval eventually acquired a bitter taste at home, since the opera's sympathetic treatment of a rabbi caused it to be proscribed when Mussolini imposed anti-Jewish laws on Italy in 1938. This embarrassment failed to prevent the composer from vilification—by contemporaries and, still more, by later generalist historians—as Fascism's toadying composer-laureate. That he accepted sinecures and a pension from the régime is true. It is also true that when his last opera *Nerone* received a star-studded première despite the government's vocal opposition to any première whatsoever, he gloated: "I shoved *Nerone* up the Duce's arse!" No wonder that the mixture of a career diminuendo and political bet-hedging has put off Anglophone musicologists, who are for the most part simple souls, auto-lobotomized by the puerile Darwinian dogma of artistic "evolution," and consequently baffled by the sheer hopelessness of trying to shoehorn Mascagni into the approved modernist canon.

Mascagni's muse could breathe only when behind the proscenium arch (and not always there); it is incomprehensible without—in the happy wording of a 1960s British musical—"the roar of the greasepaint, the smell of the crowd." Stagestruck from adolescence (most of his few non-stage compositions are in manuscript still), he attained a style so intensely theatrical that it sometimes makes Verdi and even Puccini resemble oratorio-writers manqués. For a score-reader, his idiom is almost uniquely unsatisfying, since on the printed page it can look gauche, indeed positively trite, yet in performance—even in the recordings on which we non-Italians must usually depend for our appreciation of his post-*Cavalleria* output—the gaucherie often, somehow, becomes eloquence, the triteness a sublime concision. Witness his late and defective *Il Piccolo Marat* (1921), where after hours of the most uniformly forgettable vamping (aggravated by what is a prime contender for operatic history's most incoherent storyline), the second and penultimate act

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finishes with a blazing love duet that almost melts one's stereo. Not, on the whole, prone to self-criticism, Mascagni seldom knew when his inspiration was merely on autopilot and when it had taken wing. Maybe his ignorance did him good: the idiot-savant seldom profits from being turned into a savant-savant.

That Mascagni commanded a greater emotional and technical range than all but the most omniscient opera lovers suspect is the theme of this new book, which is easily the best piece of English-language writing its subject has inspired, and which also—lest that should appear thin praise—transcends most if not all recent Italian-language Mascagni scholarship. Roger Flury, from the National Library of New Zealand in Wellington, has produced a comprehensive tour de force. Properly speaking, what we have here is a bio-biblio-discography. It is a pity that at $90 it might well be beyond the reach of most readers, but all self-respecting music colleges must acquire it.

Much Mascagni literature resides in fugitive periodicals, while most recordings of his output inhabit that strange limbo of bootleg tapings and evanescent fan-club labels to which the operatic connoisseur perforce grows accustomed for most of his rarer delicacies. Exactly how strange, several of Flury's discographic discoveries hint at. Who, for instance, would guess that recorded versions of *Cavalleria*'s Intermezzo exist for clarinet ensemble, harmonica duet, saxophone quartet, and (from three different performers in Mascagni's lifetime) professional whistler? Who, for that matter, knows enough to discourse upon the composer's non-vocal productions, one of which rejoices in the title of *Rapsodia Satanica*? Against the streamlined blandness afflicting so much phonography in our time, Flury's rich haul of singletons—mostly, though not invariably, pre-CD—reinforces one's faith in the bizarre.

It does far more besides. By his diligence and dignified self-effacement, Flury prompts the conjecture that bibliography is the highest form of criticism. It is dreadful to contemplate how Mascagni would have fared in, say, the prose of *The New York Times*'s Paul Griffiths: the clever similes would abound; the bile would flow at Mascagni's arrant failure to be Stravinsky, Webern, or Boulez; and always, like an ineluctable ground-bass, would be heard the sneer of the "progressive" apparatchik. Now and then, from Flury's unfailing expertise, a tiny but well-honed claw peeps out. Thus, the entry in a 1989 operatic encyclopedia—which dismisses Mascagni as "the most overrated of all opera composers"—inspires this laconic annotation: "notable only for the vehemence of the author's summary." Flury epitomizes another peevish 1895 criticism as "the equivalent of a headmaster's report, treating the composer . . . like a naughty schoolboy."

Perhaps Flury's greatest success lies in his revelations of Mascagni's sheer stylistic variety. No such thing as "typical Mascagni" exists; had it existed, were there among Mascagni's brain-children the same family likeness to one another perceptible in the mature creations of Puccini or Richard Strauss, he would be far better-known. A 1988 Italian radio broadcast of Mascagni's impressionist masterpiece *Iris* ranks among this reviewer's all-time musical joys, not least for the near impossibility of believing that so elegiac a score derived from the same musical intelligence as *Cavalleria*'s blood-and-sand ferocity or *L'Amico Fritz*'s gentle humor. No wonder Puccini—seldom celebrated for his eagerness to laud colleagues—spoke of *Iris* with fierce envy.

A Gulliver among swans

Jackie Wullschlager
Hans Christian Andersen:
The Life of a Storyteller.
Alfred A. Knopf, 496 pages, $30

reviewed by Alexandra Mullen

More than a hundred years after his death, Hans Christian Andersen can still lay claim

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to being a world-famous writer, but the world he's famous in is the Lilliputian one of the nursery. The title of a publication from the Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs aims to tell us all that non-Danes need to know: *Hans Christian Andersen (1805–1874): The Writer Everybody Reads and Loves, and Nobody Knows: The Real-Life Fairy Tale of the Shoemaker's Son from Odense who Conquered the World with His Magical Stories*. Andersen would have liked this title, with its puff of magical transformation. He called one of his own works on the subject *The Fairy Tale of My Life*, and he certainly wanted everyone to think it was one: "Twenty-five years ago, I arrived with my small parcel in Copenhagen, a poor stranger of a boy, and today I have drunk my chocolate with the Queen, sitting opposite her and the King at the table."

Now, for English-speakers, the arts journalist Jackie Wullschlager has written not the prettified fairy tale of Andersen's life, but his bildungsroman. Her moving and well-written book compels interest in Andersen's life, even for non-Danes. His milieu was first a provincial town, still filled with peasant customs, stories, and superstitions, and then the artistic and intellectual society of Golden Age Copenhagen, which included the choreographer Bournonville, the physicist Ørsted, and the philosopher Kierkegaard. Andersen was first noted for lushly romantic novels in the style of Balzac and Hugo; *Only a Fiddler* (1837) includes a cross-dressing Jewish heroine, which inspired Kierkegaard's first book, an attack on Andersen's lack of a world-view.

Andersen was stupendously unlucky in love. On the one occasion when he was sent a warm reply to one of his epistolary declarations of affection, the woman who was supposed to deliver it forgot all about it until three years later when both Andersen and the once-admired Mathilda were in love with other people. Wullschlager is apparently breaking the Danish silence over Andersen's homosexual yearnings, particularly as recorded in his diaries, but her discussions of his sexual life are not sensationalistic. She notes, for instance, the private sexual codes in his diaries for his obsession with the Swedish Nightingale, Jenny Lind, but calmly observes that "being fêted and celebrated was a good substitute for sex." As for his old-age passion for the ballet dancer Harald Scharff, she comments, "We can only guess at the physical details of the relationship," and then stops.

In "The Ugly Duckling," Andersen wrote, "It doesn't matter about being born in a duckyard, as long as you're hatched from a real swan's egg." Andersen was, in fact, a real shoemaker's son from Odense, but his relations were definitely odd ducks. His parents married two months before he was born, and his mother, eight years older than her husband, had already had an illegitimate daughter by another man; his maternal aunt ran a brothel in Copenhagen; and his paternal grandfather was the village madman. Andersen remembered his grandfather well: "One day, I heard the boys in the street shouting after him; I hid myself behind a flight of steps in terror for I knew that I was of his flesh and blood." Will what's bred in the bone come out in the flesh? This grandfather was also a talented woodcarver, a creator of fantastic figures.

His parents didn't have much money, but they clearly loved the odd, dreamy creature born to them. Details suggest they were unusual by Odense standards: his father carved figures for a toy theater; when the five-year-old Andersen was beaten at the local dame school, his mother enrolled him in the Jewish school instead. The occasionally idyllic parts of his childhood ceased completely at his father's death when Andersen was eleven. Thereafter, they were poor. His mother worked at several jobs including washerwoman. Wullschlager forestalls nostalgia here: "In summer this was hard work but endurable; in autumn and winter, as she stood knee-deep for up to six hours in the icy water, it was appalling, and it was then that she became addicted to gin, which she drank partly to keep herself warm." The young Andersen wasn't unob-

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servant of his mother's plight—he later defended such women in his story "She Was No Good"—but he already showed the detachment from other people's unpleasantness that was to mark his life. Like Peter Pan, indeed perhaps like all children, he was gay and innocent and heartless. As soon as possible, Andersen escaped from this misery, first imaginatively, through his books and dolls, then literally, earning money singing for the rich people of Odense and heading off to the big city alone at fourteen, ready to seek his fortune on the stage. At the ballet, he was cast as a troll.

His boldness in intruding his talents—he showed up at a leading ballerina's house and started prancing about in his stockinged feet—were matched by his ineptitude—she had him thrown out as a madman. Nonetheless throughout his life there continued to be some quality that interested people in helping him. He found a kind of fairy godfather in a Copenhagen worthy, Jonas Collin, who got up a fund for Andersen's education. The whole Collin family, "the ideal bourgeois family, successful, secure, civilized, benign," took him in—up to a point; Edvard, the Collin son closest in age, could never bring himself to be on "*Du*" terms with Andersen.

In general Andersen was lucky, extraordinarily so, in his friends; even at the end of his life, he was taken in by two Danish Jewish families of wealth, high culture, and kindness. He himself was a difficult and needy friend. His foppishly dressed gawky body, his penchant for bursting into tears of gratitude or sympathy at the least provocation, his absurd fears—that he needed to travel with a rope in case of hotel fires, that he'd swallowed a pin in some meat, that a spot over one of his eyebrows would grow over his eye—could make him a ridiculous and unlovely figure. His egotism was vast and various. It could be childish: "He had no notion of time, and as pertinaciously required everyone to be at his beck and call as any curled darling in the nursery who is at once the plague and the joy of his household," wrote an English acquaintance. It could be unctuous: "Don't you think I'm a happy man, to have all the world love me?" His self-glorifying postures were maddening. But in Wullschlager's view, the Andersen who wrote the 156 fairy tales penned self-portraits that are "inventive, harsh, spiritually true." They are remarkable precisely for the knowledge they show of human foibles, wickedness, and heroism. "Every character is taken from life; *every one of them*; not one of them is invented. I know and have known them all," he wrote.

Too true. For if Andersen was bad at entering into the feelings of others (he first read a story about a dying child to Edvard Collin's wife who had watched two of her young children die), he did have a genius for seeing himself everywhere. Thus the ebullient egotism of his Darning Needle:

> Once upon a time there was a darning needle who was so full of airs and graces that she actually believed herself to be the finest kind of sewing needle. . . . "Make way! Here I come followed by my suite!" said the darning needle, and she proudly drew the long thread after her.

Even being broken in two and lost in the gutter can't dull her cheerful enthusiasm for herself: "She'd lost her sealing wax, and had turned quite black—but then black is so becoming! 'I'm slimmer and more delicate than ever!' she said to herself." But Andersen is also present in the restless dissatisfactions of the Fir Tree who, at every stage of his life, waits for the future to be better and regrets what he has lost without having appreciated it at the time. As a baby tree in the forest, he thought, "Oh! To grow up, to grow up, to grow big, to grow old—how wonderful that would be!" Finally grown up and cut down, his tune has changed. "'Over! All over!' cried the poor tree. 'How foolish I was not to appreciate my happiness! Now it's over! All over!'" Self-knowledge here ends in ashes. Not only did Andersen connect the poles of cheerfulness and despair, self-knowledge and self-blindness,

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but he also had within him the cruelty of the Snow Queen, the dedication of the Little Mermaid, the preternatural sensitivity of the Princess with the Pea, the tunefulness of the Nightingale, the loyalty of the persecuted sister and her Wild Swan brothers, the mania behind Karin's Red Shoes, the salvific imagination of the Little Match Girl, the steadfastness of the Tin Soldier, the vain self-doubt of the Emperor, and the innocent bluntness of the little child who cries, "But the Emperor hasn't got on anything at all!"

These characters all appear within the unique mixture of humor, narrative speed, and fatalism with which Andersen experimented in the tales. The worst of them can be maudlin and just plain weird—"The Storks" tells the story of some naughty children who tease storks and "are punished by the stork bringing a dead baby brother instead of a live one." But the best of them, while perhaps more unnerving for adults than children, cling to the imagination. His late story "The Shadow" is "a demonic tale of self-annihilation," "a psychological horror story," about a philosopher who lets go of his shadow and the shadow who then becomes a man without a soul. Wullschlager is right to stress its "seamless mix of comedy and nihilism;" the creepy powers at work look back to various romantic *doppelgänger* and forward to Kafka's tales of entrapment, the odd humor of Beckett, the philosophical suggestiveness of Leszek Kolakowski. On his return, the richly dressed Shadow says, "I thought you wouldn't recognize me. I've filled out so much—in fact, I've become a man of substance." "Is it really you?" answers the philosopher. "What a turn-up for the books!" Despite his wisdom, the philosopher doesn't prosper in his profession, and, after all, even philosophers can't live on air. His friends tell him "'You're just a shadow of your former self,' and it sent a chill right through him." Like so many of Andersen's fairy tales, it does not end happily.

Even when she gets a bit impatient with his sillinesses, Wullschlager clearly holds both Andersen and his work in clear-sighted affection; he would have found it insufficient, but we can be grateful for it. Her biggest claims are for Andersen's art. He revolutionized the genre of the fairy tale. And he did this not once but twice: first as a young man by fusing elements of both folklore and *Kunstmärchen* with a racy naturalism of speech (in "The Darning Needle," for example). Second, towards the end of his life, he experimented with self-reference and a fluidity of consciousness in ways that anticipate the innovations of modernism ("The Shadow" and "Auntie Toothache"). Andersen's novels and travel books will never be much read outside a few scholarly circles. But his miniature world is recognizably his own, and there he is a Gulliver among swans.

Shorter notices

Robert Grant The Politics of Sex and Other Essays: On Conservatism, Culture, and Imagination. Palgrave, 240 pages, $55

Cultural conservatives are always at a rhetorical disadvantage to utopians and ideologues: they do not have a theory of everything. This means that they are unable to appeal to the paranoid mode of explanation that rarely lies far beneath the surface of political discourse (it is a singular, though little remarked, fact of our existence that the failing human brain often, if not always, turns to paranoia). The conservative appeals to reality, the utopian to fantasy: and to the disgruntled, that is to say the majority of the human race, fantasy is more real than reality.

The lack of a theory of everything does not mean that conservatives are entirely without beliefs, however, but their beliefs give a tenor to their thoughts rather than determine what they should be on any given subject. Conservatives tend to acknowledge that the world did not begin and will not end with them, and that those who came before them were neither less intel-

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ligent nor worse intentioned than they; that man is a fallen creature, susceptible to improvement sometimes, but open always to the temptation of evil; that politics does not encompass the whole of human life; that not all desiderata are compatible (for example, those of safety and risk-taking) and therefore there can be no final resolution of all human conflict; that to criticize existing institutions from first principles or from the standpoint of an ideal normal is ultimately to leave no institutions intact; and that order, tradition, and continuity are as important as change.

These ideas, one might have thought, are obvious to anyone of mature reflection and minimal experience of life, but they are not. On the contrary, the conservative's lack of settled doctrine by which to judge all questions is generally taken by intellectuals as a sign of conservatism's intellectual nullity. Conservatives lack the holy or magical bo tree under which to achieve final enlightenment.

Robert Grant is a member of that endangered species, rarer now than the spotted owl, and facing the inexorable fate of the dodo, the conservative university teacher of English, a literature don who does not examine all he reads through the distorting lens of gender, racial, or class resentment. As a conservative, resentment is not his cup of tea. This collection of his essays, which shows him to be a man of wide learning and sympathy, ranges from political philosophy to art criticism and commentary upon aspects of popular culture. He never writes less than clearly, he often crystallizes complex thoughts in happy formulations, and he is sometimes very funny. For example, remarking upon the title of a fashionable designer's coffee-table book, *Living with Design*, he writes "[it] suggests that interior decoration is a kind of crippling disease." Which, of course, it is.

There are essays, *inter alia*, on the English political philosopher Michael Oakeshott and Edmund Burke, on "conceptual" productions in opera and the theater, on the meaning of death, on Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the House Beautiful, and on Shakespeare's political thought. The title essay—no doubt chosen to mislead unwary feminists into purchasing the book—deals with human sexuality and the modern attempt to empty it of all but raw biological significance.

If Mr. Grant's essays have an underlying thesis, it is that human conduct cannot be understood except by reference to intentionality, meaning, and consciousness. Man does not live by lust alone. Mr. Grant strongly disagrees with those who try (usually with a considerable dose of dishonesty) to reduce human behavior to mere mechanism. For example, conceptual productions of classical operas and plays are usually premised upon the idea that their composers and authors—whose death has long ago been announced by critical theorists—did not really know what they were doing and were merely registering the Geist of their Zeit, as a barometer registers the atmospheric pressure. It therefore requires preening producers and literary critics to give real meaning—that is to say, their own meaning—to Mozart and Shakespeare. It is hardly surprising in the circumstances that cheap theatrical gimmickry should prevail; it is evidence of immodesty and egotism, the besetting sins of liberalism itself.

The essay on Charles Rennie Mackintosh is one of the best on such a subject that I have ever read. It is far from easy to write intelligibly and profoundly, without preciousness, on questions of taste: for taste is said by some to be so subjective that nothing worthwhile can be said about it. Mr. Grant demonstrates (by example, the best demonstration that we can have) that this is not so. His comparison of a Mackintosh chair with the unselfconscious elegance and functionality of an eighteenth-century chair is brilliant and illuminating. It illustrates to perfection why the cultural conservative is neither against innovation (after all, the eighteenth-century chair was itself an innovation) nor in favor of it for its own sake. And his strictures on the Mackintosh style

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are devastating in their acuity and accuracy: "whatever its point, it is trying too hard to make it. It is like being cornered by a bore: you are expected to be interested in him, but he could not care less about you." No one could actually live in a Mackintosh house, for it

> simply demands more attention than any mere house has a right to expect. Such an interior cannot express decent, unaffected ease. It is the negation of hospitality. In fact, it is barbarism posing as hyper-sophistication. Worse still, it makes stylistic innocence impossible for those who come after. Once the dyke of self-consciousness has been breached, we are all carried along in the ensuing flood.

Until, he might have added, we are washed up on the worthless shores of Cool Britannia.

As I read Mr. Grant's book, two questions passed through my mind constantly, like a threnody: how do we give practical political expression to a civilized and sophisticated conservatism such as his? And does the fact that we feel the need to do so mean that it is already too late?

—*Anthony Daniels*

Nancy Schoenberger Dangerous Muse: The Life of Lady Caroline Blackwood. Doubleday, 377 pages, $27.50

Lady Caroline Blackwood (1931–96) was a descendant of the playwright Sheridan; great-granddaughter of the Viceroy of India who annexed Burma to the British Empire; daughter of the Marquess of Dufferin and Ava, a promising, but hard-drinking Irish politician, who died fighting the Japanese in Burma, and of a vain, selfish, empty-headed heiress to the Guinness millions. Cared for by a series of irresponsible and often cruel nannies, she grew up in a crumbling Georgian mansion on a 5,000-acre estate outside Belfast. She was rich, beautiful, bright, witty, and talented, but, traumatized by childhood neglect, by the loss of her father and rejection by her mother, she became depressed, alcoholic, and ill. One of her husbands was insane, one of her daughters (a heroin addict) committed suicide, and her beloved brother died early of AIDS.

She was married to three exceptional artists and lasted about five years with each of them. The painter Lucian Freud kept weird nocturnal hours, drank heavily, gambled recklessly, and was consistently unfaithful. His early paintings of Blackwood are as sensuously appealing as the Venus of Botticelli. The tragic *Hotel Bedroom* (1954), in which the handsome Freud gazes down at his suddenly aged and wretched wife, suggests that something has gone terribly wrong with their marriage.

The stunningly attractive Israel Citkowitz, a protégé of Aaron Copland, had stopped composing by the time he married Blackwood. He mainly looked after their three daughters, one of whom was actually fathered by the dashing English screenwriter Ivan Moffat. Blackwood often appeared grimy and lived in squalor, with "bloody sanitary napkins on the floor; cigarette butts, bottles of liquor, and empty pill boxes . . . scattered around the room." She neglected her children, who in turn were brought up by incompetent nannies and felt rejected by their mother. "She would give them everything," a friend recalled, "except what they wanted"—attention and love. Schoenberger, obscuring a crucial point with the passive voice, writes that Moffat's six-year-old daughter Ivana "was seriously scalded when a kettle of boiling water turned over on her lap." Blackwood naturally felt guilty, but it's not clear who was responsible for the accident.

When Blackwood, always meager of utterance, sat next to Robert Lowell at a dinner party in New York, she shyly tried to break the ice by admiring the soup. "I think it's perfectly disgusting," Lowell replied, and they lapsed into silence. When they were married she was terrified and exhausted by Lowell's manic attacks and kept Citkowitz in their household to protect the children.

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While living through the emotional chaos of his painful disengagement from Elizabeth Hardwick and of Blackwood's acute nervous depression, Lowell wrote the sonnets in *The Dolphin*. Blackwood's disastrous marriages to three artists matched Lowell's to Jean Stafford, Hardwick, and herself. She married Freud in a Registry Office, Citkowitz in an Orthodox Jewish ceremony in Yonkers, Lowell in a shoddy shed in Santo Domingo.

Blackwood, both inspiring and destructive, broke men's hearts and was like a "radiant disease." Like Lowell, she fed on others, but was sufficiently disciplined to write books when she was falling apart. Lowell finally left her but was dead on arrival, clutching a Freud portrait of Blackwood, when his cab reached Hardwick's flat. Like Leonard Woolf and John Bayley, Blackwood was liberated and inspired to do her best writing—novellas, stories, memoirs, essays, and a book on the women's peace movement—after the death of her brilliant spouse. Her work was characterized by an obsession with the ugly side of human behavior, a revelation of her own base instincts, a cool narration of outrageous events, and an uneasy mixture of the comic and grotesque. Her dark, grim, bitter vision resembled that of Jean Rhys and the equally underrated Elizabeth Smart.

When exploring the drug-ridden and dangerous transsexual bars in New York, she once locked herself in a toilet stall with a complete stranger—who then did her hair. Describing how her sister gave riding lessons to disabled children, Blackwood weirdly explained that Perdita "had to find exceptionally tame ponies for 'the thalidomides'—ponies that were 'almost dead, like a kind of sofa,'" because some of the children had no arms or legs and had to guide the ponies with their teeth. Blackwood died of cervical cancer at the age of sixty-four, leaving investments worth $2 million, a house in Sag Harbor worth $1 million, and several precious paintings by Freud and Francis Bacon.

Schoenberger's biography is a fair notion,

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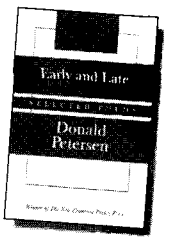

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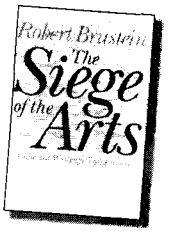

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fatally flawed. She was not well served by the various editors she effusively thanks in the acknowledgments. The book is badly written ("She liked the glitz of the occasion, but Hollywood's patina quickly wore off"), and has many typos, spelling mistakes, and factual errors (even the alphabetical list of names is out of order). The Protestants still rule Northern Ireland, Noel Coward did not buy Ian Fleming's house in Jamaica, the hotel in Denver is called the Brown Palace, the town in Los Angeles is Venice, the gentlemanly Lionel Trilling was not a "backbiter," the London *Times* is published daily, and David Sylvester began publishing his interviews with Bacon in 1963 (not 1993).

Schoenberger, who often takes speculation for fact, quotes John Huston's absurd statement about Irish witches as if it were true. She has a maddening habit of repeating herself (at least eighty times) rather than developing her points: a quite serious case of Stein-stutter. Her structure is also lopsided, with only one paragraph on Blackwood and Lowell's year at Harvard in 1973–74, but ten padded pages on her disastrous weeklong visit to Maine in the mid-1990s. She treats Blackwood's fiction as thinly veiled autobiography and has very little to say about her art. After writing one descriptive paragraph on Blackwood's "greatest book," *Great Granny Webster*, she quotes other critics for the next three pages.

This biography—still discussing Blackwood's genealogy on page forty—is superficial and secondhand. The hastily worked-up material is heavily dependent on printed sources. Schoenberger's descriptions of the playwright Sheridan, the Viceroy of India, and the Burma campaign are especially shallow. Worst of all, she has no clear understanding of the British class system. She claims that Francis Bacon, whose father was an Irish horse-trainer, had an "upper-class" childhood; that the well-named Muriel Belcher, a vulgar model who ran a shabby bohemian bar, was "grandeur personified."

Schoenberger lists a series of names instead of explaining who the people actually are, and is especially weak on the background and character of men like Blackwood's handsome lover, the late Alan Ross. He was a naval officer on the Murmansk run, cricketer and racehorse owner, poet, autobiographer and travel writer, married to the Fry Cocoa heiress. The porcine Cyril Connolly, who vainly pursued Blackwood, was no match for the elegant Alan Ross. This book is a mess, and the puff on the dust jacket manifestly absurd. When Blackwood's letters and papers finally become available, we'll need another biography to do justice to this fascinating subject.

In Italy, between marriages and addicted to vodka, Blackwood impulsively went to bed with a stranger whom she thought had keen insight into her character. He caressed her and whispered "*morbida*." Knowing no Italian, she did not discover till much later that he was referring to her soft skin. Though confused and misguided, Blackwood was always recklessly bold, sexually adventurous, and deeply vulnerable.

—Jeffrey Meyers

We mourn the passing of Lionel Abel

1910–2001

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Notebook

Mordecai Richler, *1931–2001*

by Mark Steyn

Mordecai Richler died on July 3, and within minutes of the announcement there was a stampede from the grand panjandrums of "CanLit" to conscript him posthumously into the ranks of "Canadian novelists." Mordecai was a novelist who happened to be Canadian, which isn't quite the same thing, and he spent much of his life making gleeful digs about all the great writers who were, as he put it, "world famous in Canada." Richler, by contrast, was world famous in, among other places, Italy, where his last novel, *Barney's Version*, is a bestseller in its seventh printing and hugely popular among a population not known as great novel-readers. The word "Richleriano" has become the accepted shorthand for "politically incorrect."

Richler was certainly Richleriano. In *Solomon Gursky Was Here*, there's a scene set in the early Seventies in which one middle-aged character, forced to play host to a gay son and his lover, staggers drunk into the bathroom to check the pencil mark he's drawn on the jar of Vaseline. His wife is broken-hearted, he's filled with disgust. "It's not that I'm prejudiced against faggots, it's just that I don't like them," he says, pouring himself another Scotch. It is a satirical moment, but the pain underpinning it is true in a way that the approved supportive bland uplift is not. Yet I wouldn't bet on any tyro novelist's chances of sneaking that scene past a North American editor, most of whom are decidedly non-Richleriano. Pat Carney, a Canadian senator and former cabinet minister, wrote a memoir last year and discovered after publication that a change had been made to the passage detailing her father's job on a merchant ship to China: the editor had reflexively amended "fireman" to "firefighter." The senator's father was not, as the ensuing paragraph made clear, a man who drives a municipal fire truck and squirts a hose at blazing buildings, but a man who stokes the ship's furnaces with fire-making coal. Nonetheless, better to get things wrong than risk even the most hypothetical offence. A passing remark that the drab dress Canada's governor-general wore for the Speech from the Throne made her look like a washerwoman was struck down, over the author's protests, on the grounds that "it suggests all Chinese-Canadians worked in Chinese laundries." (Her Excellency the Viceroy was born in Hong Kong.)

Against this grubby world of feeble evasions and genteel absurdities, Mordecai Richler stood firm. He was not in any coherent policy sense a conservative, but he had no time for the faintheartedness of a liberalism so defensive that, as he wrote in 1959, it couldn't bear to contemplate "a Negro whoremonger, a contented adulterer, or a Jew who cheats on his income tax, buys a Jag with his ill-gotten gains, and is all the happier for it." The straitjackets of identity politics have only tightened in the four decades since he wrote those words, but the

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strange thing is how much of it he foresaw so long ago, almost half a century now, in the novel in which he found his voice, *The Apprenticeship Of Duddy Kravitz* (1959). Two decades later, Kerry McSweeney pronounced magisterially in the journal *Studies in Canadian Literature*—what, you don't subscribe?—that "however memorable, *Duddy Kravitz* is hardly a masterpiece." Compared to what? As the years go by, *Duddy* seems more and more remarkable in its anticipation of contemporary fads. Take Virgil, the novel's kindly epileptic, who wants to be proud of his condition and to that end starts a magazine for epileptics with features such as "Famous Health Handicappers Through History": "No 2: A Biography Of Julius Caesar. Life was no breeze for the young Julius, but from the day of his birth until the day he met his untimely end he never once let his health handicap stand in his way. Julius had been born an epileptic and was not ashamed of it. He had guts-a-plenty." This is 1959: decades before the Americans with Disabilities Act, before "differently abled" and "visually impaired," before the FDR memorial in Washington got bogged down by accusations that they weren't placing sufficient emphasis on his polio.

The Richleriano aspects of Mordecai's career fall into three phases: first, he offended Jews; then, English-Canadian nationalists; finally, Quebec separatists. In the early Jew-offending phase, he gave a lecture to a Jewish audience at which someone asked: "Why is it that everybody loved Sholem Aleichem, but we all hate you?" The answer to that hardly needs explaining. Mordecai remembered every detail of his working-class childhood in Montreal and the rare glimpses he got of the would-be gentrified Jews in the suburbs of Outremont and Westmount, and some of those details were too funny to let go. In *Solomon Gursky*, it all comes together at the seventy-fifth birthday gala of the Bronfmanesque Bernard Gursky, a coruscating dissection of the charity banquet circuit—"plaques, plaques, and more plaques, which they awarded one another at testimonial dinners once, sometimes twice a month. . . . They took turns declaring each other governors of universities in Haifa or Jerusalem or Man of the Year for State of Israel Bonds. Their worthiness certified by hiring an after-dinner speaker to flatter them for a ten-thousand-dollar fee, the speaker coming out of New York, New York—either a former secretary of state, a TV star whose series hadn't been renewed, or a Senator in need." Bernard Gursky's birthday is the *ne plus ultra* of such events: the medley from Jimmy Durante; the Israeli Ambassador's presentation of a Bible encased in hammered gold, the flyleaf signed by Golda; his wife Libby's rendition of "their song," which is inevitably "Bei Mir Bist Du Schein," with the "Bella, bella" line changed to "Bernie, Bernie."

> An official of the Canadian Football League passed Mr. Bernard a ball, a memento of last year's Grey Cup game, that had been autographed by all the players on the winning team, and then one of the team's most celebrated players, a behemoth who peddled Crofter's Best in the off-season, wheeled a paraplegic child to the head table. Mr. Bernard, visibly moved, presented the ball to the boy as well as a cheque for five-hundred-thousand dollars. Three-hundred guests leaped to their feet and cheered. The boy, his speech rehearsed for days, began to jerk and twist, spittle flying from him. He gulped and began again, unavailingly. As he started in on a third attempt to speak, Mr. Bernard cut him off with an avuncular smile. "Who needs another speech," he said. "It's what's in your heart that counts with me, little fellow." And sotto voce, he told the player, "Wheel him out of here, for Christ's sake."

Canadian Jews didn't care for such stuff, and called the Canadian Jewish Congress to see what could be done about Richler. The CJC sent him a note, but he didn't take too much in, being distracted by the letterhead: "Cable address JEWCON."

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Richler liked to say he emerged from two ghettos—one Jewish, one Canadian—or to put it another way: one highly marketable, one of little interest. I would rank him above Philip Roth, et al., if only because the Canadian qualification of his Jewishness gave him an insight into the points where identities intersect, where the perspective shifts. One of my favorite Richler characters is Mortimer Griffin, the protagonist of *Cocksure*. Mortimer is a middle-class Anglican from the town of Caribou, Ontario, who's made it big in swingin' London as the editor of the small but influential Oriole Press. But when the firm gets bought up by a Hollywood mogul, Mortimer suddenly finds his life freighted by Jewishness. On the one hand, for the first time in his life, he's the odd one out, because he's not Jewish, which was never a problem back in Caribou. On the other hand, everyone seems to assume he is. A man from *Jewish Thought* starts following him around accusing him of being a self-hating Jew who's swapped his real name for something more Anglo; his London friends corroborate the story by pointing out how anti-Semitic he is; his black secretary tells him she won't sleep with Jews and he can't prove he isn't one because he's circumcised. To make matters worse, his wife is cheating on him with a man she thinks is Jewish, but is actually a bloke called Gerald Spencer who figured it would be a good career move to change his name to Ziggy.

Richler wrote *Cocksure* at the close of a twenty-year sojourn in London. He moved back to Montreal to find himself in the midst of an alleged Canadian Renaissance—a cultural flowering of a young nation eager to cast off both colonial ties to the Mother Country and the cultural oppression from the south. It's very difficult typing that sentence without tittering. Be that as it may, while Richler was out of the country, Canada had acquired the Governor-General's Awards for Literature, Canada Council grants for writers, and an elaborate public subsidy racket for Canadian publishing houses that ensures to this day that no matter how bad a book is a publisher has very little incentive not to publish it.

Things were different when young Mordecai was shopping his first book:

> Then, Andre Deutsch, Ltd., the British publishers, made an offer for my novel. A conditional one, however. They would publish *The Acrobats* if I agreed to do more work on it. I was offered an advance of 100 pounds (approximately $275)—50 pounds on signature of contract and another 50 once my revision had been found acceptable. I sent an immediate cable of acceptance. "I don't get you," my Uncle Jake said. "You put two years into writing a book and now you're happy because some jerk in London has offered you a lousy two-fifty for it. You could have earned more than that cutting my lawn."

Richler was dispatched by Andre Deutsch to Toronto, to impress the Canadian distributor, who instead pointed out the grim truth. "No serious Canadian novelist—including Morley Callaghan or Hugh MacLennan—is able to support himself strictly on the sale of his novels in Canada. The distributor was prepared to risk a first order of four-hundred copies for all of Canada. I stood to earn approximately $32, if they sold out."

All the above was true, but already irrelevant. Richler, whether consciously or not, was already writing for the world, his publishers, editors, and agents in London and New York pre-dating those he eventually found in Toronto: in the Fifties and Sixties, he wrote about Canada from London, distance bringing his experience into focus, sifting and sorting. In any case, he didn't write about "Canada"—whatever that is—only the particular and isolated corner of the Jewish quarter of anglo Montreal in francophone Quebec in the Canadian section of North America; a ghetto in a ghetto in a ghetto in a ghetto. St. Urbain Street is as foreign to any Torontonian or Winnipegger as it is to a New Yorker, Dubliner, or Parisian. In the Ivy in London or the Polo Lounge in LA, Richler and his fellow

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scribblers (his preferred term) could talk about novels, deals, and money, but, when he showed up in Vancouver or Edmonton people just wanted to badger him about (dread phrase) Canadian identity. "Special pleading," he sighed, "whether by Canadian sports writers, kibbutzniks in Galilee, or proliferating Canada culture boosters, never fails to move me to mockery."

On the off-chance that you haven't read Hugh MacLennan's essay *The Psychology Of Canadian Nationalism*—a title so flamboyantly off-putting as to raise suspicions that he was deliberately trying to reduce his royalties as some sort of tax wheeze—let me explain that the author's principal point is that a "feminine psychology" runs through Canadian literature: the Americans are the masculine in North America, Canadians the feminine. Most of us can see where he's going, and that's all we need to know, thank you very much. Nonetheless, Michael Valpy in Toronto's *Globe and Mail* felt obliged to expand the thesis the other day. He notes that America's most famous adolescent is Huck Finn, a boy bustin' to "light out for the territory," beyond the constraints of the civilized world, while Canada's most famous adolescent is Anne of Green Gables, a girl so domesticated that her address is part of her name. According to Valpy, the defining emblem in American culture is the horse, in Canadian culture the house: "To be on a horse is to move. To be in a house is to be fixed." Actually, a horse can be fixed too, but that's another story. "It is an American, Thomas Wolfe, who says you can't go home again," Valpy continues. "It is a Canadian, Morag in Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners*, who says you have to go home again to be in harmony with life."

As a column intended to give you one more reason not to read Canadian novels, Valpy's is a masterpiece. Unfortunately, it seems he intended precisely the opposite effect, blithely assuming that his house/horse hockey would make readers chuck their Wolfes and rush out to buy *The Diviners*, if only to check whether Morag expresses herself quite as clunkily as Valpy claims. If it is true that Canadian literature is feminine and housebound, then Mordecai Richler was not a terribly Canadian writer. For one thing, he was, as James Wolcott put it, a "horny" writer. For another, he got out of the house. His film credits include *Room At The Top*, a quintessentially northern English kitchen-sinker with Laurence Harvey from those gloomy, monochrome, petrol-rationed British Fifties, and *Fun with Dick and Jane*, a quintessentially garish Hollywood comedy with Jane Fonda. In his novels, Mordecai was a kind of Huck of Green Gables, secure enough in his sense of home to "light out for the territory," the territory in this case being London, Paris, New York, Hollywood, Spain, and beyond, because for a Canadian, unlike an American or an Englishman, if you don't go to the world, the world sure as hell isn't going to come to you: that's why Canucks, not Yanks, are the great mid-Atlanticists—the high yallers, the octoroons of the world's great cities, able to pass wherever they go.

Richler's life skewers the smug delusions of the Valpy school. And if there is a Canuck Huck, it's Duddy Kravitz. And if Canadians cling to home and security, what are we to make of *Solomon Gursky Was Here*? Richler took the Wandering Jew myth and plunked it in the frozen north, placing one of the chosen on Sir John Franklin's lost expedition to the Northwest Passage in 1845. He'd been reading a lot of "magical realism" and called *Gursky* "the first South American North American novel": it's magical realism with jokes, a surprisingly effective combination and perhaps the closest to the Great Canadian Novel we'll ever get. It does everything Valpy says Canadian literature doesn't do, wandering off to London, Washington, Entebbe, the Polar Seas, as, indeed, Canadians do.

But in the twenty-four hours after Mordecai's death the grand subsidy-fatted bores of Canadian letters lined up to insist that, in fact, the guy was very much a "Canadian writer." Even his Canadian agent, Louise Dennys, lapsed into the usual shtick:

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> Mordecai mentioned that Canada was to him a fragmentary place in the Seventies. I think it's because of Mordecai that Canada is no longer a fragmentary place, not only to ourselves but to other people outside of Canada. He's given it a particular and distinctive shape that we can only be truly grateful for.

Even if this were true, which it isn't, it would be the least of his achievements. On the matter of Canada's distinctive shape, he and I were once on a radio show in New York with Garrison Keillor, who opined en passant that the reason Americans found it hard to get interested in Canada was that the country was impossible to visualize: it has no recognizable shape. The southern border is just about clear, but the rest of it bleeds away into Queen Maud's Gulf and the Arctic Circle and God knows where. In his last years, Mordecai himself took on the same indeterminate, shapeless quality as his native land, with everything straggling and dangling and spreading over the map—the floppy mop of gray hair, the jowls, the jacket, the hanging belly. He, like Canada, was in much better shape thirty years ago. But he was one of the few genuine laugh-out-loud authors and, at a time when the comic novel is in poor health, Richler's reliability in this respect was good news for readers all over the world who have no interest in the non-fragmentariness or otherwise of Canada. He was rooted in Montreal but, unlike the general tenor of his obituaries, he was not parochial.

He jeered not just at the stunted nationalism of Quebec but at the moral smugness of modern Canada, which was why the state had such difficulty paying tribute to him. The prime minister's statement would have had him weeping with laughter: "Mordecai Richler was the quintessential Canadian man of words, and his loss leaves us grasping for words that can do justice to his importance in Canada's artistic landscape," said Jean Chrétien, grasping for words, eventually deciding that the guy "made us all proud to be Canadian." The charitable in-

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terpretation is that this is the standard tribute for Canadian "men of words" and that whoever wrote it had never read a word of Richler, but it would be more pleasing to think they'd read it all too well and decided anyway to kiss him off with the usual lame-o CanLit boosterism. As for making us all proud to be Canadian, here's how one Richler character summed the place up:

> "Let me put it this way. Canada is not so much a country as a holding tank filled with the disgruntled progeny of defeated peoples. French-Canadians consumed by self-pity; the descendants of Scots who fled the Duke of Cumberland; Irish, the famine; and Jews, the Black Hundreds. Then there are the peasants from Ukraine, Poland, Italy and Greece, convenient to grow wheat and dig out the ore and swing the hammers and run the restaurants, but otherwise to be kept in their place. Most of us are huddled tight to the border, looking into the candy store window, scared of the Americans on one side and the bush on the other."

The irony in all this is that, in the end, Mordecai was one of the few writers in the world who can claim to have saved his country. In the Nineties, irritated by Quebec separatism, he started writing about its oppressive triviality: arriving outside a pub in Montreal one day, he found an agent of the Office de la Langue Française photographing the menu blackboard and measuring the inscription "Today's Special: Ploughman's Lunch." Under Quebec law, signs can only use English words if they're half the size or less of the accompanying French words. An essay for *The New Yorker*, later expanded into a book *Oh, Canada! Oh, Quebec!*, caused particular distress to the Parti Québecois, who never forgave Richler for, as they saw it, making them a laughingstock in the outside world.

In fact, the outside world never gave Quebec a thought. No doubt in Manhattan there were those who marveled, "Can you believe it? There's a long piece in *The New Yorker* this week that's actually readable!" Then they promptly forgot about Quebec. Back home, though, where Anglophones had reacted to separatists either by enduring their humiliations (the so-called "lamb lobby") or by fleeing to Toronto, Richler's essay legitimized scorn, while the PQ's outraged reaction to the puncturing of their prestige only emphasized the stunted and pitiful state of the nationalist movement. In the 1995 referendum on secession, the final result was separatists 49.5 percent, federalists 50.5 percent. It's not too fanciful to assert Richler made just enough difference to save the day. I happen to disagree with him on separatism, since on balance I find smug English Canada the more insufferable, but even so Quebec boasts the world's dumbest secessionist movement, forever trying to explain to its citizens why we need to set up our own country exactly the same as the one we'll be leaving. But there's no doubt Richler the "controversialist," the "misanthrope," the "curmudgeon" did more for Canada than all the sunny maple-draped multiculti CanLit boosters put together.

At his home in the Eastern Townships, he'd repair to the Owl's Nest every afternoon and enjoy a little light banter with the bar's cheerfully unreconstructed clientele—plumbers, carpenters, leathery truck-driving women. "Are they better company than Martin Amis?" I asked him. "I wouldn't say that," he said. "They're not as witty. But they're more interesting, it's a richer world. The literary world, in the larger sense, is dull: it's a tradesmen's world." He came home not to be a "Canadian writer," but to be a writer. The Montreal he wrote about is fading fast. As he pointed out, he's far from the only Anglophone Jew whose kids have all fled to Toronto, London, wherever. What matters is not that he gave shape to Canada, but that he gave shape to his own fictional landscape. One day, soon, St. Urbain Street will seem as fanciful as P. G. Wodehouse's Drones Club or Blandings Castle. But, like Wodehouse, it will endure.

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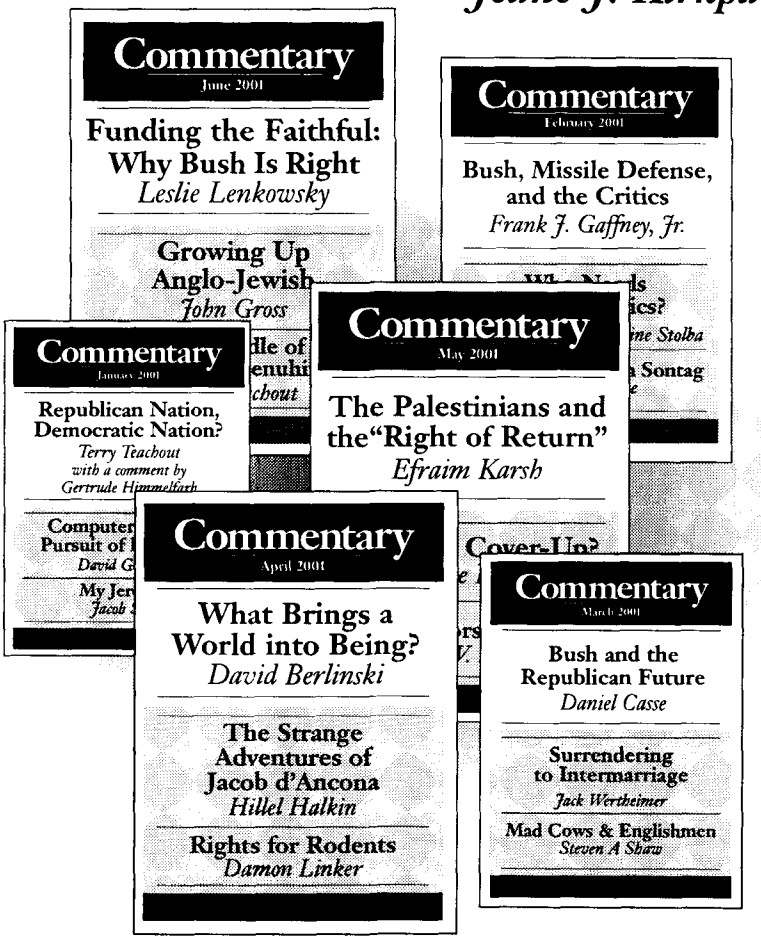
"Very, very important to the life of the United States, to the West, and, I am convinced, to freedom."

—Jeane J. Kirkpatrick



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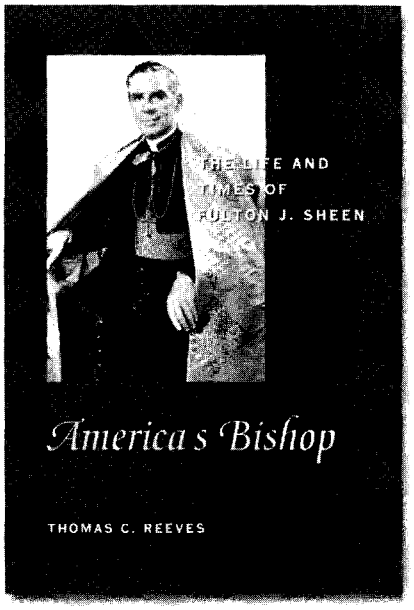

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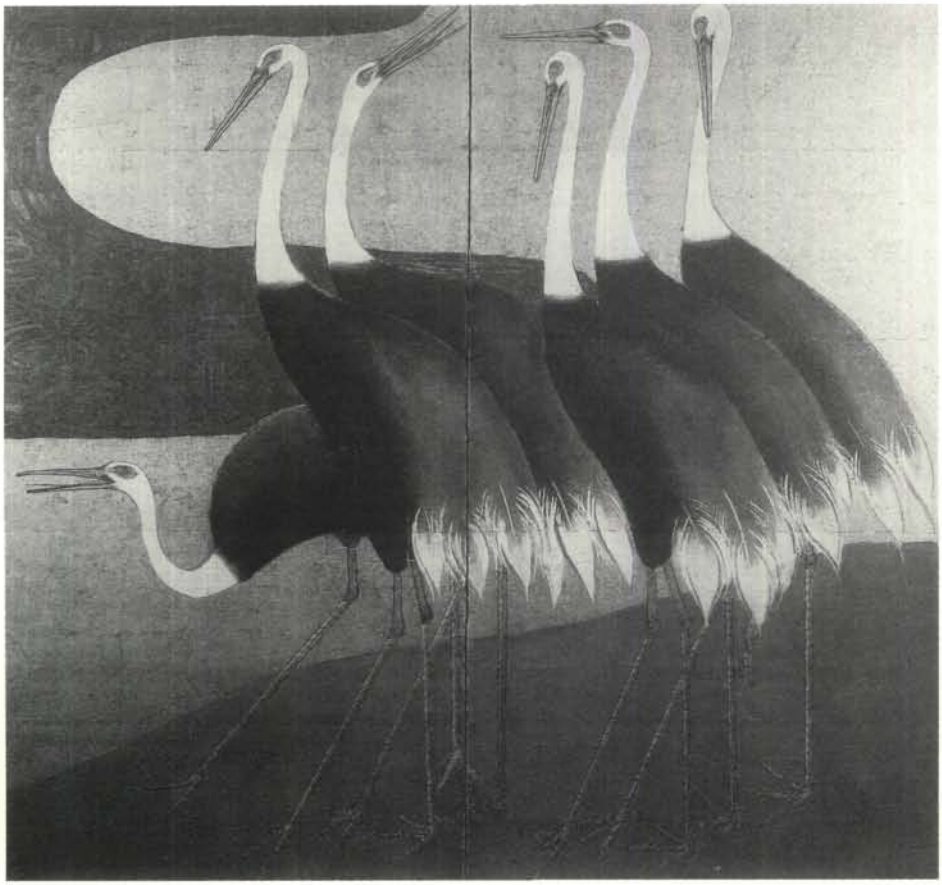

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